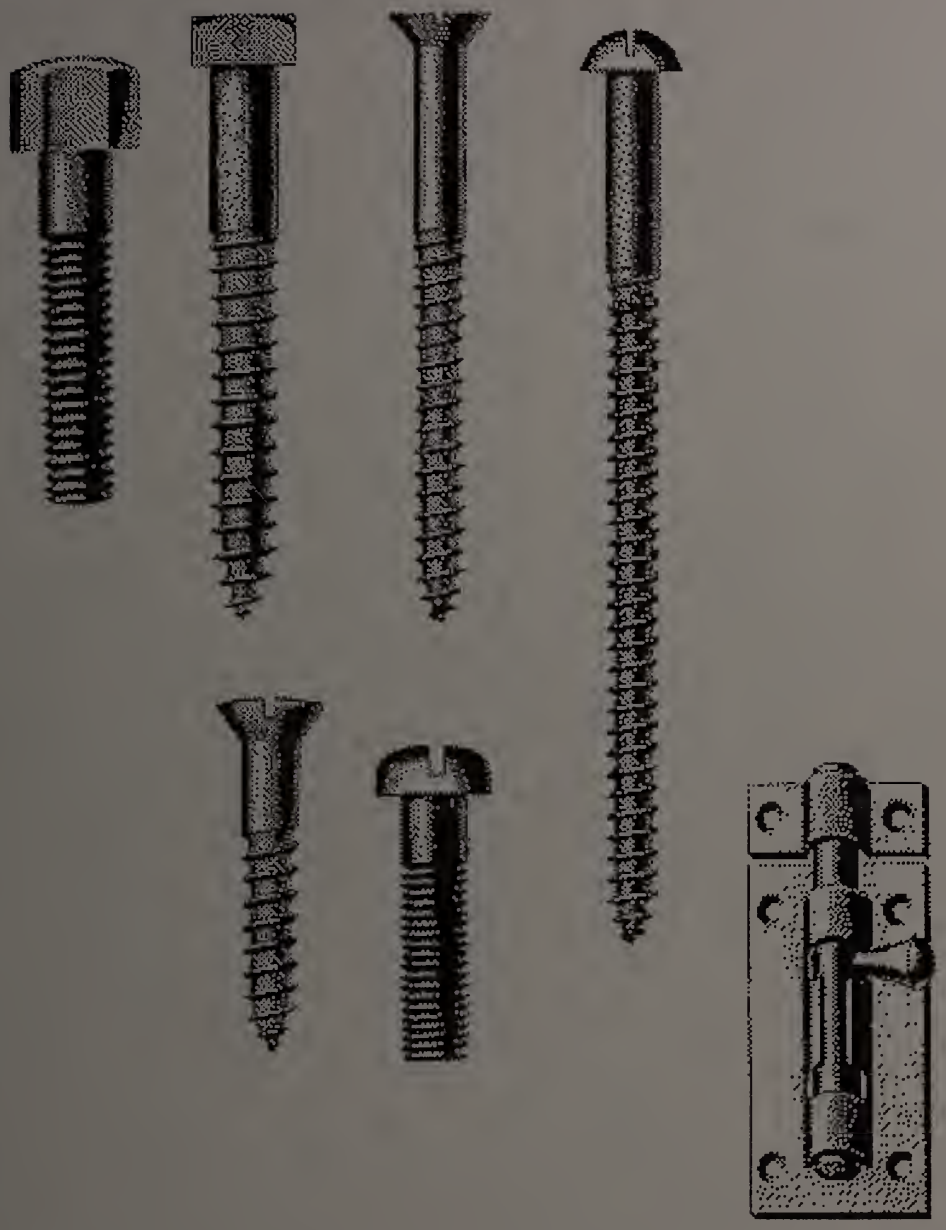

Writers in Progress

1997-1998

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Dedication

To all the students who think they can't,
and all the students who know they can.

Because of the large volume of submissions received this year from all the sections of Basic Writing in both Haverhill and Lawrence, we have had to make some difficult choices in deciding which papers to include in this booklet. Ideally, we'd like to publish every paper submitted, but because of space limitations, we can't, and we know that some students will be disappointed to find that their work has not been published here. We apologize for this, because we believe that every writer who has had the courage and pride to submit his or her work deserves recognition. This issue is dedicated to all of you.

❖ We honor submissions from:

- *Anonymous*
- *Angel Alba*
- *Rafael Avellan*
- *Laura Boyd*
- *Zaida Collado*
- *Ricardo Colon*
- *Hiram Cruz*
- *Hector Cruz*
- *Daniel DiNicola*
- *Malyssa Engel*
- *Derek Loosian*
- *Evsey Moroz*
- *Juan Ovalles*
- *Christian Padilla*
- *Jacqueline Perez*
- *Starsky Perez*
- *Yannelly Rodriguez*
- *Evelyn Santana*
- *Edward Sarasin*
- *Amy Sewell*
- *Jonathan Valdez*
- *Christle Windt*
- *Robert Zieba*

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Introduction

Writing is a daunting and overwhelming task for some, and a welcome experience for others. Regardless, writing is a way of discovering things about oneself, the world, and others. Writing about past experiences can provide people with new insights into what they have been through and learn new lessons. Writing about experiences that took place in different parts of the world is a way of integrating differing lifestyles and beliefs. Writing also provides an opportunity to learn about others by reflecting on a variety of perceptions and observations.

Each year former Basic Writing students' papers are selected to be included in *Writers in Progress* as examples of assignments completed to fulfill course requirements. This year *Writers in Progress* contains reflections of significant experiences in the writer's lives. Through reading these works, we learn about a Buddhist temple in South Vietnam, transitioning from being a mason to being a student, life as a shrimp fisherman, losing friends and family to war and life, and more.

By writing these papers the writers made new discoveries about themselves and their experiences. By reading these writings you will make your own discoveries, continuing on your own journeys.

--Caroline Anderberg
May 1998

My Forever Place

by Hanh Pham

In my childhood, I grew up in Saigon, the capital of South Vietnam before it was lost to North Vietnam. Following a typical Vietnamese Buddhist tradition, I often went with my family to a special religious place. It is not far away from where I used to live, three or four miles perhaps. This place is called Vinh-Nghiem pagoda.

From the city, if you take a left on Cong-Ly Street and keep on going toward to the Phu-Nhuan district, you would see the pagoda on the left side of the street. Besides, the pagoda's pointed tower's top could be seen form a distance, whenever one traveled back and forth from the airport to the city. In front of the pagoda, there is a giant concrete gate with three entries covered with rough gray crushed stone. The gate leads into the pagoda's property.

Passing through the gate, the rustling sound from the leaves of a giant Bodhi tree with its heart-shaped leaves draws people's attention to turn their heads to the right. Buddha got his enlightenment under this variety of tree after forty-nine days and nights deep in meditation. Behind those leaves, there is a garden that has some bushes here and there on the short, green carpet-like lawn for meditation purposes. On the opposite side of the gate, a bookstore sells Bibles, some Buddha statues, Saints pictures, and some instruments for worship. Up above the bookstore, there is a seven-story tower, each floor displaying one of the Buddhas and the statues of the Bo-tat, Buddhist Saints. After walking though the huge asphalt driveway there are three side-by-side stairways, 15 feet across and ten feet apart. Each stairway has three levels representing the Buddhas, the Bibles and the Laws, and the Monks – a Trinity. These stairways, with twenty-five risers each, lead to the main building.

From the sky, the building is formed like a big fat letter "I." The roofs are made of orange clay tiles, and these tiles are laid the same pattern as the dragon's skin. Also, these roofs are curved in a way that looks like a big wave from the ocean at the corners. The end of the curved roof has a gray molded concrete sculpture with the details of the Phoenix's head. On the top of the roof, there is a symbol of Buddhism, covered with gilded gold leaves. There are five thick, dark, double doors, carved with leaves, flowers and dragons, which open inward, leading in to the building.

Everyone must take off their shoes and lay them in the wooden racks before entering the main building. Once inside, the cool air blasts your body from an air-conditioned room and a thick gray granite floor. The smoky scent of cedar or some other kind of hardwood is from the burning incense. The room is about 60 feet wide and deep, and 40 feet high. At the middle and a quarter of the way from the door of the room, there is a black table gilded with red and gold

highlights. On that table, there is a one-foot in diameter brass pot of incense with smoke coming out, and a statue of Buddha Duoc-Su, the Buddha of Medicine. In Buddhism, it is believed that there is not only one universe but also countless galaxies. Therefore, that would mean that there are some other earth-like planets that may have some life-forms that could be assumed are human-like. Throughout these planets, Buddhas exist in the past, present and future, which is why there are quite a few Buddhas that we know and believe in.

One step up beyond that table, in the middle is the statue of the Buddha Thich-Ca who is sitting on top of a giant golden painted lotus flower in meditation form, with a soft smile. He is covered with a dull yellow cloth form the shoulder down, but the left shoulder and arm are bared. This statue is about 30 feet tall from the floor. There are two other statues, Bo-Tat Chuan-De and Bo-Tat Pho-Hien, one on each side of Buddha Thich-Ca, who are helping to record the words of the Buddha and preparing for worship. A big table is in front of each statue. These tables look the same as the above-described table, just different in size. On top of each table is a brass pot full of incense, a pair of three-foot tall brass candleholders, and some plates of fruits and foods given as gifts of worship and respect to the Buddhas. Along the side walls are carved hardwood pictures of the scenarios in the Pure-Land of the Buddha, and three-foot tall brass statues of various Buddhist Saints. These are displayed on a long shelf and are behind red molded wall rails.

On the other side of the wall that is behind the statue of Buddha Thich-Ca, there are more statues. The standing one is Bo-Tat Muc-Kien-Lien who helps all deceased souls who reside in spiritual hell. In front of this statue, there is one sitting who is the founder and is called the ancestor of this monkshood. Displayed on both sides of these statues are the pictures and names of the deceased believer from this pagoda.

Anyone can walk into this building on any day during open hours. From time to time, there are only a few people in the building, fewer than fifteen perhaps, and it is quiet as a desert at these times. People are there praying silently to show respect to the Buddhas, the pagoda, and the surrounding people. At ceremony time, monks with shaved heads are wearing ceremonial clothing – long yellow robes with two-foot wide sleeves, and a yellow cloth over the dress. These monks are leading the worship with the low and calm voices along with the sound of a bell and other worship instruments. Everybody is praying in the harmonic motion of voices as the sound of thunder from the distance.

Going to the pagoda is not a mandatory action, because in Buddhism, there is no force that makes anyone do what they do not want to do. Buddhas do not have the power to make the people come to the pagoda; only their free wills do. Besides, people do not have to go to the pagoda to pray and to seek the Buddhas. Buddhas are everywhere, especially inside our body: "Buddha is the heart; the heart is the Buddha." But the more I go there, the more I have found

that I am getting closer to myself, hoping to be a better person. That makes the pagoda one of my most favorite places to go. I am attached to the pagoda.

The pagoda, in general, is the compound of a monkshood. It is a place for the monks to stay, to live, to practice, and also to teach Buddhism to young monks and Buddhist people. Moreover, there is no nursing home for monks, because monks have to work and find the way to enlightenment for themselves and the others twenty-four hours a day for their entire lives. There are no retired monks. Simply, minks stay in the pagoda and die there. That does not make the pagoda isolated to the outside world, but the pagoda is opened for anyone for any reason. People can walk around inside the pagoda area, to visit the garden that is full of the soft fragrance from blooming flowers all year around. The high school and university students could stop by and use the pagoda as a public-studying place during their exams periods. I was one of those. Sometimes, someone travels and has no place to stay for the night. They could be allowed to stay for the night in the pagoda. The pagoda is for everyone.

Each time, when I came to this pagoda, I felt peaceful and calm. Today, if I have the chance to escape the daily noises, I would love to go to the pagoda. After paying respects to the Buddhas, I just sit down to find myself, and to not think about anything but relaxing. However, now I live in a home away from home, but the Vinh-Nghiem pagoda is always my forever place. I am wondering what the Buddha is smiling about.

***

***Hanh Pham**, who lists his age as "too old," took Basic Writing in order to improve his English, and delighted the Writing Center staff with his beautiful tales of far-off Vietnam and of his fascinating experiences. Friendly and eager to learn, Hanh has a wife and four children at home, and works as a senior engineer assistant in electronics. When he began Mary O'Neil's course in the spring of 1998, Hanh says he was "very nervous and unsure how and what to write," but feels much more confident now.*

The Old Homestead

By Stephen Lamothe

'Tis a fine place you have here, John Greenleaf Whittier. Your house is painted in red and white. I wonder if the colors are true. I knocked on the old oak door, but no one was there to answer my call, so I walked out back and got the same. You told me someone would be at home, but apparently not. The shades are not drawn, and the curtains are opened, so I hope you won't mind if I look through your windows.

Inside your house, I find that all your furniture remains the same, but the floors are worn out and have no shine. It must be from all the company. Your desk still sits in front of your favorite window. The inkwell is dry, and your books and writing tablets have been all put away, as though you were never here.

I hope you don't mind if I wander into your backyard and sit for a spell. To the left of me, I see two oak trees standing side by side. I guess I'll just walk over, sit myself down and lean back on one. John, it's so quiet here, and I wish you were here to give me some company. We could just sit and watch the autumn leaves as they fall from the trees. Maybe we could talk about the past. I am sure you'd have some stories to tell, but if you were here, I would ask you to recite a few of your poems. If you didn't want to, it would be all right. We'd just sit and listen to the autumn wind.

It's a fine autumn day, my friend. You have no idea what you're missing. The sun is shining, no clouds in the sky to cover the blue. Once in a while, a bird will fly by and land on a tree branch. He'll sit perched as he looks around, and if I'm lucky, he'll sing a song for me. I appreciate the scenery as much as you probably did.

I know it's not polite to criticize, but the yard is in need of a clean sweep. The fall leaves are lying on the ground. I know that you are a busy man, so I hope you don't mind if I lend a helping hand. I knew at one time where you kept the old wooden rake. I hope it's still there for both of our sakes. But then I walked over to the place and found no wooden rake.

I hear the calls of cows across the road, so I guess I'll take a walk over that way. Before I do, I must take note that your well has probably gone dry. Have no worries. When you return, I will have fixed you up with a new inside well. All you do is turn a handle, and water pours from a spout.

The landscaping in front remains the same. The flagstone wall still extends in both directions. As I walk down the stone walkway, "I am lost." As I look across the way, they've taken all our dirt trails away and replaced it with tar. I remember how I loved to hear the sounds of hooves stomping on ground, as the carriage wheel spun around, leaving a trail of dirt. How society has changed! I wish you and I were back to younger days, when life was so simple.

John, the barn is empty. I can't believe my eyes; only four milking cars in the yard, and none in the pasture. I remember the last time we met was on a hot summer's day. I walked into the barn and you were standing with a pitchfork in hand, tossing the old hay away. I had asked if you would like to take a walk. You said "No, my friend. I have livestock to feed and the stalls need to be cleaned."

If my mind stands right, John, I could swear you had at least thirty or more cows in the pasture, with three horses, and chickens and roosters. I remember now, John. One day, the taxman came knocking. He was standing by the front door, pointing his finger away. So, the taxman has likely taken all the livestock away, John. I thought you said all taxes were paid, but "Apparently not, my friend."

A car approaches from afar, with a speed greater than two horses, and slowly comes to a stop. The side door opens, and a tall thin lady appears. Gracefully, she walks up the stone walkway and suddenly she turns and shouts to me "Hey, you be on your way." Leaning against the barnyard fence, I was astonished not knowing what to do. In a quick response, I shouted "John! Who is this woman? I don't ever recall seeing her here before; she can't be family. I heard some talk of a housekeeper moving in, to watch the place while you're away." Then suddenly, I realized John wasn't here at all.

I walked across the road and up the stone walkway. Facing the door, I tapped ever so lightly. Then I heard the sound of footsteps approaching, as they shuffled along the old pine floor. The woman opened the door, and I quickly apologized for my presence. She asked my reasons for being here. Seconds passed by, and then in a soft gentle voice, I replied "John is my friend; he said he would be back someday, so I just stopped my along my way. Apparently he hasn't returned just yet. So I thought it would be fine to sit and reminisce a bit." She apologized for being so rude, then told me her name was Rebecca. She invited me inside to sit and talk, so I followed her into the living room. I sat myself down in John's favorite chair, across from the old fireplace. Rebecca had left the room, and I was there all alone.

My eyes were slowly wandering around a room that was so familiar to me when I remembered the night John and I were all alone. It was a cold December's night, and snow was falling to the ground. Both of us were sitting directly in front of the fireplace, trying to keep ourselves warm. Suddenly, John looked to me and asked a favor. In a soft voice, he said, "Would you mind reading a poem of mine?"

I replied, "No, I don't, my friend." I read it not once, but twice, and then asked, "What is this great poem to be called?"

" 'Snowbound,' " he replied.

Rebecca returned carrying a tray. She remarked, "I'm sure you're hungry. It's probably been a long day for you." Then carefully she placed the tray on a table next to me. She sat down on a soft-cushioned chair and asked if I'd mind

telling her a few stories about John. We talked for two hours before realizing the time. The sun was setting and it was getting late. We both knew it was time for me to go. Rebecca looked at me, but her smile turned into a frown.

"I enjoyed your company," she said. "You must come back again. But John won't be coming back. He's gone to a place of no return." When the old oak door closed behind me, tears began rolling down my face. I refused to believe what had been said; she was only the housekeeper.

I started down the stone walkway, until I reached the end. I turned back and looked with tears in my eyes. "I know, my friend, we will meet again on a very special day," I shouted.

***

Stephen LaMothe, 42, spent the fall 1997 semester in Joanna Fortna's Basic Writing Class producing elegant and poetic papers. A computer science major, he enjoys shooting pool and hopes for a career as a computer specialist.

Traditional African Kitchen

by George Wagereka

The modern kitchen, or rather, kitchens in America, are just places where you make your meals and have them if there is room for a small dining table. Most kitchens consist of a cook stove (electric or gas), a sink to wash the dishes, a refrigerator, and maybe a dishwasher. They also have cabinets to store the dishes and cooking ingredients. In most kitchens, there is rarely room for more than two people to be in there are the same time!

A traditional African kitchen of the Kikuyu tribe, is more of a living room than a kitchen. This is where the children spend their evenings with their mothers because there are no televisions to watch or computers to play games. The children do not need to study for there are no schools. The kitchen is therefore set to accommodate them and give the impression of a living room; a place to relax.

The walls of the kitchen are round, and made of mud so that once inside you can have a view of everybody in the room from any angle. The base forms a circle with a radius of about two and a half yards.

A fire is set right in the middle of the room with three stones around it to hold the cooking pot and control the flames. It also allows the smoke to go up straight to the thatched roof, which is made of grass. The roof is concave and slants at an angle of about sixty degrees, which keeps the rainwater from penetrating the grass. Smoke from the fire is absorbed by the grass, making it somewhat water-resistant.

In the middle of the roof hangs the firewood supply for the kitchen. The firewood is right above the fire, but high enough above the flames not to catch fire. The height of the ceiling with the roof's slanted angle is about seven feet. The room has two doors; a half door which acts as a kind of screen door, and a full doorway as the main door. The half door is the outer one, which keeps wandering animals from entering the room, the wind from blowing into the fire, or babies from crawling in or out of the room as they learn to walk. The babies are either safe in the room if the mother is with them or outside the room if nobody is inside to watch them.

Along the wall are the mats where children sit as the meals are made. The round shape allows even warming, to keep everyone inside warm with the main door shut. The main door also keeps night flying insects from entering the room.

There are no pictures on the walls but some people make animal drawings with white chalk on the walls. The kitchen has no windows; it is kept bright by the fire that never dies at any time.

The dishes are put right behind the door to create sitting room for the kids. There are no sinks or refrigerators because the food is picked and cooked fresh. Dishes are washed outside the room and the cooking ingredients are stored in a different room. Any grilling or roasting of meat is done in the open

area outside the kitchen. Most or all of the food cooked is eaten within the mealtime, leaving no waste and nothing to store.

In the nights before and after meals, you can hear talking and laughing from the kitchen as the children and their mother tell stories and jokes. The big boys and the father do not visit the kitchen. They have their meals in the father's bedroom where they sit and get some advice from the father on how they are expected to behave as young men.

When I sit in my living room watching television, waiting for my roommate to leave the kitchen so that I can go in and make myself a meal, I just imagine the fun I would be having if I was back in the traditional times, sitting with my brothers and sisters telling jokes as Mother prepares the meal.

***

George Wagereka, 25, was a student of Catherine Howar's in spring '98. Currently enrolled in the LPN program, George works as a CNA and hopes to pursue a bachelor's degree in Registered Nursing. In his free time, he enjoys fishing, reading, and telling stories. All semester long, he wrote with captivating grace and fluency about African life, myth and tradition. Before enrolling in Basic Writing, George says he was not sure of his writing ability, but now sees a great improvement in his skills and confidence. He lives in Lowell.

My Country, Vietnam

by Que-Chi Au

I have been here in this country almost nine months. However, in my mind, I always miss one place, the place where I was born and grew up, where my family is still living. And I never think I will forget it some day. That's my country, Vietnam.

Vietnam is a small country located in Southeast Asia, neighboring China and Cambodia. Because of this location, we just have two seasons: sunny and rainy. All year, usually, it is very hot over there. So if you like crowded, interesting places with warm weather, please visit Vietnam one time. However, if you prefer cool weather, let's take a walk along our countryside.

If you ask me to talk about Vietnam, first of all, I would like to mention about "a water buffalo and plough in the rice field." That picture is very typical for my country. In the past, we used to use buffalo and ploughs to plow our fields. At that time, we didn't have many kinds of machinery, because Vietnam was a very poor country and it is still not rich yet. So, the picture that a farmer worked very hard with a buffalo and plough in his field is very familiar to us. Look! He is sweating because of the hot weather. However, nowadays, we don't use water buffalo and plough to work our fields. Moreover, agriculture is a basic step to develop my country. So, I don't think Vietnamese people, I mean the younger people can forget that picture.

Still in the countryside, please keep walking along there with me, you will have a chance to listen to lullabies mothers often lull for their children to sleep. Those lullabies have been transferred from this life to the other life, this century to the other ones. So, they still exist now. They are not composed with pop, rock, jazz or rap, but sung by word by word clearly. And each song is one lesson for us to learn. Like me, when I was a baby, my mother used to sing these songs for me to sleep. Now I still remember and I'm not a baby anymore, but I wish that I had a chance to listen to them from my mom just one more time. It doesn't matter if the mothers' voices are good or not. But when they lull lullabies for their kids, their voices become very sweet, tender and very smooth with these songs, because it comes from the their hearts. I am sure if you listen to our lullabies, you would think about your parents, your country, ancestors, etc.

Are you tired? You want to stop by someone's house here? Wow, that house looks poor, right? It is a typical country house here. Perhaps, it has been like that for generations, even though most of the houses have changed. It could have been made a very long time ago. See? Most of the houses here are made of bricks and cement, but this house is made of coconut leaves. The piles of the house are bodies of strong, big, tall trees. We cannot use just any kind of tree. Usually they use "ban" or "thau lau" trees. These are the kinds of trees worms

cannot eat, so it could stand there for a long time. That is also why the house is a natural color, the color of dry leaves. However, it makes the house very cool and easy to build. When the wind blows over, the house can join with those leaves on the trees to concert a beautiful song.

Look! There is a garden in the front yard with a lot of beautiful plants. Here, they spend their free time planning these kinds of plants. They can make them with many shapes such as, a dragon, deer, or other shapes they think are beautiful. Let's go through the garden to get in the house. Don't be afraid of the dirt floor! That is natural land that they made very hard, so you won't slip. Enter through the front gate of the house, you can see the large back door makes the wind circulate. The house is decorated like other houses of the time. It's just only one way. The cabinet is here and the table and bed match each other. Perhaps, these furnishings came from their ancestors.

Are you hungry? Don't worry! Let's ask them for something to eat. Don't be afraid! Our Vietnamese people are very kind and friendly. Do you smell something now? Wow, it smells good, right? It comes from the hostess's kitchen. She must be cooking something for us. Look! The big fishes may be caught from her lake. A lot of the vegetables, like spinach, bitter melon, tomato, beans, etc., come from their garden and are cooking in a pan. Usually, people who live in our countryside eat very simply. They eat whatever they have in their gardens. However, their meals are not less delicious. So, don't miss the chance to try some! Let's enjoy our meal! Actually, you can get and taste Vietnamese food everywhere, but it is usually not the same as they make in Vietnam. In Vietnam it is made with fresh food. Our food is almost like Chinese food, but a little bit different.

You must be very tired now. Do you have any impression of Vietnam yet? These are some details about the country. I hope you enjoy your trip. I can take you everywhere in Vietnam. I never feel bored or tired. However, the farther I take you, the more I miss it. So, join me next time, please. Okay?

***

Que-Chi Au was a student of Faith Benedetti's in the spring '98 semester. She is 23 and lives in Lawrence.

My Room at My Grandmother's House

by Thomas Cheever

I now have my own room at my grandmother's house. It used to be my father's room when he lived there. It's on the second floor of a one-family house on Bayview Avenue, located in Lynn, Massachusetts. The second floor has three bedrooms located right next to one another: one where my grandmother sleeps, one spare room which belonged to my grandmother's only other child, and the third one, which is mine. I spent a lot of time in this room as a young boy and spend quite a bit of time there now.

Not a lot has changed in the room from then until now as far as modern things go. The telephone is an old rotary, and not your now standard pushbutton model. The television is not cable-ready, has no remote control, and only gets your basic 4, 5, and 7 channels. The room originally had red wallpaper, until many years ago when I helped my father, who was good at woodworking, cover all four walls with four-inch wooden planks. When you walk into the room through a brown wooden panel door, the first thing you notice is a single bed right in front of you on the right side of the room. On the bed is a brown bed cover, and folded at the bottom is an old afghan my grandmother made many years ago, which has been on the bed ever since I can remember. The walls are adorned with some of my old sports posters I collected as a boy, pictures of Larry Bird, Jim Rice, and Fred Lynn to name just a few. The floor is very old and resembles linoleum.

When I was younger a friend and I collected nip bottles, which are just a smaller version of liquor bottles, and the wall to the left of the bed has two shelves displaying the nips neatly and in alphabetical order. One shelf I built in woodshop when I was in junior high, and I helped my father build the other one many years later. Right below the shelves on the floor is an old wooden chest I had found years before down in my grandparents' cellar, in which I keep my old baseball cards and newspapers of past memorable sports events. To the left of the door that leads to the room is a single chest of drawers where I now have numerous sports memorabilia, including Red Sox yearbooks, autographed baseballs, and autographed pictures. Above the dresser is a shelf my father built which contains his and now both of our baseball trophies and plaques.

To the right of the dresser is the only closet in the room. The door which is the same texture and color as the bedroom door is the exact same minus a doorknob. In this closet are a lot of my grandmother's dresses, and on the only shelf in the closet are old comics I collected as a boy, and an old shoebox that has stamps from letters my grandfather sent my grandmother during the war. On the floor to the right of the chest is an old train set my father collected as a boy. The pieces are neatly placed in a row according to year. The drop ceiling above was also installed when the walls were covered over, and right in the center of the ceiling is a light hanging from a wire because we never got around to getting

a cover for it. Under the bed I have a collection of old Norman Rockwell *Saturday Evening Posts* that I found in someone's trash as a boy. In each corner of the room diagonally across from one another are two model airplanes that I helped my father build when I was small. They are hung by fishing wire, so as to make them look like they are flying.

I have many pleasant memories of this room when I was a small boy. I would come to my grandparents' house for the weekend, and I would run right up to my father's room, where he would be laying in bed watching the ball game. I could smell the scent of my grandfather's cigar as I ran up the stairs. As my father watched the game, I would play with my baseball cards. I would put them by teams, as the smell of Grandma's cooking would seep into the room from downstairs.

I will never forget the wonderful smell of bubble gum as I opened a fresh pack of baseball cards in my father's room. This room meant and still means a great deal to me, and the memories from this room I am sure I will not forget for this lifetime.

***

Amesbury resident ***Thomas Cheever*** *studied Basic Writing in the fall of 1997 with Catherine Howar. Returning to school after a 10-year hiatus, he found unexpected success as a writer and enjoyed his writing experience greatly. "I can't tell you enough how much this course has opened my eyes to the wonderful and often challenging world of writing," he says. Thomas is a liberal arts major who is now interested in pursuing some sort of writing study.*

A Gift From God

by Catherine Blanchette

Sharon was a late Christmas present for my whole family. She arrived when I was just five years old. I thought it was wonderful, me a big sister. I wondered what it was going to be like being a big sister. From the moment I first saw Sharon, I fell in love with her. Her tiny little fingers had a firm grip, and she had a couple of cute strands of blond hair on the top of her head. I could hardly wait to get this tiny baby home, where she belonged. Sharon is a true gift from God.

I'd always bring Sharon for walks in her carriage, with my older sister Helen. And feeding Sharon was a new adventure all of the time. When she was finished eating she would blurt out, "No more, yick!" and then she would play with her food and get all messy. "This big sister stuff is fabulous," I remember thinking.

As we grew older, we would play together all day long, jumping rope, playing jacks, riding bikes, and playing with dolls. And when bedtime came around, we would be real quiet in our bedroom and tell stories, sometimes even scary ones. Sharon would always cry if they were too scary.

On occasion, my parents would get upset with me, and Sharon would start to cry and say, "Mommy and Daddy, Cathy will be a good girl. Tell them, Cathy." You could see the sensitivity flowing through her large brown eyes. It hurts Sharon more to see another person hurt. A compassionate caring person is the woman she has become.

Sharon is like a chameleon; she shows many different traits in her personality. She is like June Cleaver from *Leave It To Beaver*, sitting at home waiting to welcome her family and to hear how their day went. Then like Roseanne, a well-rounded woman with a very vocal voice, trying to be rough and tough when in fact she is extremely soft and caring. She loves being a social butterfly, making sure every one around her is happy, comfortable, and having fun. Then there are occasions when she likes to curl up on the couch and catch up on some reading.

Sharon has taught me many valuable lessons, the most important one being believing in yourself. When I was going through my divorce I had the hardest time believing in myself. She took the time to teach me that all over again, by opening my heart and letting me know that love was still in my life. She always tried to show me, in my eyes, that I would make it through one of the toughest transitions I'd have to face. Slowly, but surely, I started to believe in myself again. I don't know what I would have done without her love and support.

Sharon is always there to help. Once she called me and asked if she could take my children. I asked, "Why?"

She replied, "Yesterday when we were talking you sounded like you needed some time to yourself."

You see, even if I am not asking for help, Sharon knows when I need help. She seems to have intuition about things of that nature. Not just for me, she is like that with everyone. She says, "Helping people out is a sign you care. And I care."

At the age of thirty-three my sister has the funniest sense of humor. From one moment to the next, you never know what she'll do. She will start by pushing you around with her weight, pretending she is going to beat you up. When she pegs you on the floor a loud laugh comes out, then you are being smothered with kisses.

You usually see Sharon dressed in casual clothes, wearing just a hint of frost lipstick in a light shade to match her complexion. The only time she dresses up is when she is going somewhere special, end even at that Sharon still uses a very minimal amount of make-up. Her beauty is not only skin deep but shines through her body.

Sharon is the type of person you love to be with. She proudly exclaims, "Life is for living and having fun, so let's live and have some fun." Having fun to Sharon means doing the simple things such as going out for an ice cream cone and visiting the playground with her children or just sitting in her backyard enjoying the sun.

Our bond continously grows stronger, each and every day. Even if our flow of life doesn't bring us together, she is still right beside me, making me a stronger and a happier person. Everyone that knows Sharon sees what a wonderful woman she is. It is something that comes from inside of her and brings people to have a very special relationship with this wonderful gift from God.

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Thirty-eight-year-old ***Catherine Blanchette*** *is not only a proficient writer and a credit clerk by trade, she is also the mother of James Robert, 15, and JoAnna, 13. Catherine is a liberal arts major who is aiming for a career in business management and enjoys bowling, playing guitar, and camping. As a student in Mike Wilcomb's spring 1998 class, she found that she "really love[s] to write."*

The Strength of a Mother

by Ray Anderson, Jr.

A low feeling permeated my heart one warm afternoon as I dropped myself in an old sofa in the living room after a hectic work day. The smell of yesterday's supper still lingering in the air mildly lifted my spirits. It reminded me how good and well-prepared it was by the cook who happily made it. Yet the low, sinking feeling remained prominent as I released a heavy sigh. No sooner had I regained my breath then came the sound of soft footsteps and a squeaking screen door to interrupt my brief moment of solitude. I looked towards the front door, gazing at its black glossy surface as the sound of jiggling keys prepared to unlock the large entrance. A short, stocky black woman emerged from the doorway. As her black hair frizzled about, and the smell of perfume overtook the smell of yesterday's meal, yesterday's cook had just arrived home.

As the cook entered, she gave a big sigh of relief, a big warm smile and a warm hello. Her smile was big enough for the whole world to share. I turned a half-hearted smile to the cook. She could immediately tell I was not happy. "Had a tough day, huh?" she said.

"Yeah," I said half-heartedly. "And you?"

"Heh! So-so," she said, as she scurried off to the bathroom. I started to smile, forgetting the low sinking feeling I had. I shook my head with amazement and disbelief, suppressing an outburst of laughter that started building up inside me. It was like clockwork every evening when she came home from work. A quick, warm "Hello," and a quick sprint to the bathroom was her common routine. It seems so funny as you watch her race across the living room floor, shaking the family pictures sitting on top of the entertainment cabinet. I couldn't help realizing how cute and funny she is when it comes to doing the average human task. I began to forget the low feeling I was having. My spirits were gradually lifting higher.

I suddenly began to smile as memories of the past crept into my mind. I continued to slouch in the old sofa, ignoring the cat that jumped up to greet me. I began patting the gray oversized furball as it arched its back, responding to my slow gentle strokes across its back. Memories began to ease my mind as I thought of life and the cook who had just emerged from the bathroom. I sat back thinking about her, and wondered how she managed to live this long despite all the problems she had dealt with. By comparison, the problems I had were nothing next to hers.

She suddenly emerged from the dimly lit hallway and greeted me again with a warm smile and with a loving concern in her thoughts. Realizing the somber mood I was in, she headed for the kitchen. She began to ease the feeling

with a humorous story from her place of work at the Social Security Office. As I followed her into the kitchen, I couldn't help noticing how cute she looked in the outfit she was wearing, the look of a moderate executive.

Her skirt was light blue and hovered over her short legs as they swayed from side to side from her fairly large hips. A white blouse with a ruffled collar ran from the front of her torso all the way up around her neck with her dark round face sitting in the middle like a flower in bloom. Her hair, still frizzled and out of line, revealed a wig was in use. I stood at the threshold of the kitchen to get closer to the conversation we were trying to have. She barely realized she often talks and walks and leaves the listener behind. Realizing that I was not happy, she reached up and gave me a warm kiss on the cheek as if I had just won a NASCAR race. For some silly reason, she knew that it would cheer me up, and it did. She began to chatter away about her experience at work. Her soft-spoken words eased my thoughts as the conversation continued. We don't always see eye-to-eye, but nevertheless she was pleasant to talk to. Her eyes twinkled from the bright kitchen lights that reflected off of her contact lenses. I sat at the kitchen table as the pots and pans clanged when she handled them. As she continued to talk, I drifted away from her conversation. I began to think of how she handled herself through some turbulent years.

My mother was raised in a life of poverty, helping to raise a younger brother and sister, facing stern grandparents and racism, raising two uncertain teenagers after a painful divorce, and, sad but true, witnessing her mother's murdering when she was five. Despite these past experiences she became very strong-hearted with a strong mind. Her perseverance gave me the strength and courage to deal with the various problems that life throws before me. It made me feel proud, for this strong-hearted, strong -minded cook is my mother.

As she continued to prepare dinner I thought of the many good times we would have playing Scrabble during a dreary rainy afternoon; enjoying the big breakfast she would often make on Sunday mornings; playing cards along with my sister as we grabbed handfuls of potato chips and popcorn; laughing the evening away reminiscing over the funny moments she had to deal with raising my sister and me; cuddling together on the sofa as we watched some scary sci-fi movie during an extremely cold blizzard; and listening to her play the piano to break the boredom of a cold evening. I enjoyed the many fantastic meals she would prepare, especially my favorite: homemade baked macaroni and cheese, slightly sprinkled with paprika, along with fresh buttered corn and a plateful of crispy fried chicken that would make Colonel Sanders cry in envy. I've always noticed how she really enjoys cooking. It was never a job to her. It was sheer pleasure, more so if an army platoon walked in. She would be happy to feed them, too. And quite often she would make too much. I always admired her for that, because we compete to see who can cook the better meal, for I enjoy cooking also. Of course she wins hands down.

The smell of the completed cooked meal interrupted my thoughts as it passed by my nose. I could not help noticing how young she still looks for someone who is sixty years old and looks and acts as if she could live another sixty. I had to admit, despite all the problems she has dealt with, she is generally patient, slow to anger, and very loving. Having the attributes she does has made me appreciate how fortunate I am to have a mother who loves and still cares. Her inner strength and loving heart reveals the true strength of a mother.

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A student in Greg Mendonca's spring '98 class, ***Ray Anderson*** *is an amateur guitar player who had "written several songs and poems on [his] own" before taking Basic Writing, and feels he has gained "a strong desire to write more . . . and more knowledge [to] communicate efficiently . . . on developing new ideas." Currently employed as a circuit board plater, Ray is majoring in computer-aided drafting at Northern Essex and is aiming for a career in either drafting or music.*

Greg

by Jamie Bateman

Waking up at 9:00 a.m., Greg starts his day. Yawning as one hand reaches for a Marlboro medium, his first cigarette of the day, he flicks on the radio and listens to Howard Stern. After taking a shower, Greg prepares for his day at Northern Essex. He allows himself enough time to stop at Dunkin' Donuts, where he gets a large iced coffee with cream and sugar on his way to school.

Meanwhile, sitting under a tree on the side of the Spurk building, I await his arrival. Glancing up from my work, I see Greg drive by in his large, blue, Chevy pick-up truck, equipped with a small hula dancer on the dashboard. The dancer no longer hulas, and goes topless. A NASCAR racing sticker covers a crack in the bumper, and the gas cap is permanently open. I begin to put my work away when I spot him, standing six feet tall, muscular and thin, walking towards me.

He is wearing his well-worn Andover Lacrosse hat on backwards, which covers his shaggy dirty blond hair that bounces in the wind. His skin possesses that enviable smooth, translucent quality, which often becomes flushed with natural shades of pink. His eyes are a beautiful color blue, and I feel as though I'm looking into the sky on a clear day every time I see them. When he approaches I notice he has on the usual, a plaid flannel shirt with the first few buttons undone over a T-shirt. Over that is his navy blue Billabong zip-up sweatshirt, unzipped, as well as his khaki Abercrombie pants and broken-in New Balance sneakers.

"Good morning. How did you sleep?" he asks, as he sits down beside me.

"I slept well, thanks," I answer. Then we talk for awhile about nothing in particular.

"What time is it?" Greg asks.

Looking down at my watch I reply, "Oh, it's five of. We should get going because we don't want to be late."

Walking into the school we discuss where we will meet after class. "Have a good class," he says, leaning towards me to give me a kiss.

"You too. See you later," I answer.

Greg and I went to the same high school. However, I didn't know him too well until the spring of our senior year. We both took marine biology, and he sat in front of me. I perceived Greg to be a quiet guy who keeps to himself, but this made me want to know him more. *How* was the question, though, since he never goes out to the hot spots in town where everyone hangs out. I knew he worked at his mom's store, the Andover Gift Shop. I thought going to the store to buy nothing was too obvious, which meant I had to be creative. One day during lunch, I spied him walking across the caféteria, so I sprang from my seat and followed him to the snack bar. Standing like a doofus behind him in the line, a

plan came to me. I had missed marine biology, and needed to know what happened in class. I tapped him on the back, but he didn't seem to notice, so I called his name. Again, there was no response. Getting discouraged, I decided to try once more. This time he heard me, and as he turned around, the look on his face was one of surprise. My heart jumped into my throat, and while trying to swallow it back down, I managed to say, "I missed class today. What did Mr. Orban cover?"

I thought by the look on his face I should mention what class I was talking about. Shyly, he mumbled a number of words, none of which made sense, but I pretended to understand. I replied, "Yeah, that's what Jeff was telling me."

The next thing he said, I actually heard, and it was, "It's impossible. Good luck." Later, I found out he was talking about a quiz, and it was hard.

I have been seeing Greg for about five months, and in those five months I have learned a great deal about him. To the average person, Greg would seem to be shy. However, once I got to know him, I found that he is a caring and understanding individual. He's my male best friend, always there when I need him. He has an objective way of thinking, which makes me think out all aspects of a situation. I never would have realized any of these positive qualities had I not overcome the original shyness.

One night Greg and I were on our way home from Dairy Queen on Route 28 in North Reading when I got pulled over by the Andover Police. I was quite shaken up when the cop told me that my license was suspended and my car was not registered. Greg was wonderful in his many attempts to console me. The moment that follows is hard to capture, seeing as though many strong feelings passed between us without words. I was on the verge of tears when Greg leaned over to give me a hug, which started the tears to trickle down my face. I managed to hold them back pretty well until he hugged me harder and said, "Go ahead, let it out. You'll feel a lot better." Standing there in that dark and lonely parking lot I let the tears flow. Greg was right. I did feel a lot better.

Greg also has a silly side to his personality that makes being around him fun. One evening we were lying on my bed watching TV, when he slowly pulled me closer to give me a hug. I thought to myself, "Oh, isn't that sweet," until I realized that what was really happening was a sneak attack for the world's biggest wedgie. "This means war!" I said, lunging toward him and starting to tickle him for all I'm worth. It was great watching him squirm this way and that. However, since I was enjoying it so much it cost me my tickle rights. Suddenly he flipped me over and pinned me down on the bed. He tickled me so hard I thought I was going to pee my pants. I made many attempts to break free.

However, they all failed. The next thing I knew, I was hanging upside down off the side of the bed and getting an even bigger wedgie than before.

I don't know where Greg will be in ten years from now, and I get the impression that he doesn't either. However, I know he will be happy, and so will the people around him. Greg is the kind of guy who is willing to do anything for the people he loves. This will assure him success in whatever he decides to do.

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Jamie Bateman, 19, is aiming for a career in Elementary Education. As a student in Joanna Fortna's section in fall '97, she began the semester saying writing "was always a hassle." After completing the course Jamie "enjoys writing now and plans to do it in (her) spare time." Jamie lives in Andover.

The Train Ride

by Noel Bergeron

It was December 29, 1995, four days after Christmas. I was 5000 miles away from home. The other members of 586th Engineer Company and I were getting ready to load up all our equipment and go to Bosnia. The bridge bays, work boats and vehicles were all loaded up on railhead (trains). We were in Belgium, staying in a resort courtesy of Uncle Sam and the U.S. Army. The rooms were nice. The food was catered, and it felt like it was going to be our last meal. We were all pretty scared because of the prior situation in Bosnia. We had heard about the war and the landmines and we didn't know what to expect. The first night in Belgium, my section leader said to us "Live it up. We don't know where we'll be next month."

So, we loaded all of our equipment and we carried our gear. The basic load was two duffel bags and battle rattle – an M-16, helmet, fragmentation vest and LCE. The gear we carried was essential to our survival. We boarded the train. We had six cabin cars, with four men to a cabin. The living on the train was tight and uncomfortable, living on top of each other with all of our stuff. Each man was given a case of MREs (Meals Ready to Eat) in addition to all of our things. The train ride was going to last only four days, and then we would be ready to down load in Bosnia.

The first day of our trip was a change from what we were used to, because we were all cramped in a small train cabin. The time seemed to drag. The first day went on for what seemed like forever. The four guys that were in the cabin with me were all good. Thinking of those guys brings back good memories. We played cards a lot--Hearts, Poker, Spades. Ramon, one of my very good friends, would always say to me "You best not be cheating." The living conditions were very tight. The cabin was so small that every time you moved, you'd bump the guy next to you. The bathrooms were like an airplane bathroom. The toilet water was blue. The faucets didn't work. There was no place to wash. There were no beds. We slept on seats and on the luggage racks. There were two bench seats and two luggage racks. The window seat had a view of the European countryside. The big, snow-covered, rolling hills were breathtaking. We made the decision that we would rotate the sleeping arrangements – one night on the seat, one night on the luggage rack. The first night I drew the luggage rack. The night started off bad – the heat in our car stopped working and it was freezing. I had a feeling that the situation was going to get worse before it got better.

The next morning, the heat was still broken and we were all huddled up under blankets. Outside, it was a winter wonderland. The snow fell on trees thickly, and the flakes were huge. The little towns we rode through were covered in a blanket of fresh snow, and the only things visible were snow-capped

roofs with smoke billowing out of their red brick chimneys. The view was like something out of a television Christmas special.

The heat stayed off. People began to get sick. The illness began in the cabin next to ours. The biggest and strongest guy in our company came down with flu-like symptoms that grew worse and turned into a rash. His legs were all covered with little red welts. The rash soon covered every inch of his body. He said, "This rash is very itchy."

The next person to get the rash was in the same cabin. Before we were able to contain the rash, it was out of control and spread quickly. We put all the sick in one area, separated from the general population. The rash was popping up everywhere. One of the guys in my cabin caught the rash, and the guys in the cabin next to us had it too. The only sounds I heard in the night were of coughing people. It was like a living a nightmare, a horror film gone bad. The train ride had gone from bad to worse. The sickness continued to spread, and the fear was growing in the soldiers also. No one knew if the rash would ever go away, if the rash had a cure, if we were going to die.

After four days, I still hadn't caught the rash. We arrived in Hungary in the very early morning. It was 0100 hours when the train stopped abruptly. There were men in contamination suits entering the cabins of the train. The suits looked like space suits. The faces of the men were hidden behind large protective hoods. The spacemen identified themselves as doctors. The doctors entered each cabin.

"Is anyone sick in here?" they asked. We all sat up and looked at one another, and said "No, no one sick in here." The doctors began to take away our friends and comrades. The men and women taken from the train were taken to an Army hospital. The rest of the company was put in quarantine. After a week, our friends were all returned to our company. We sat in quarantine in Hungary for ten days. The doctors identified the rash as Belgian measles. After the ten days, we were on our way to build our bridge. The train ride lasted only four days, but they were the coldest and scariest four days of my life.

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A native of Salisbury, Mass., ***Noel Bergeron*** *brings an energy and zest to his writing that is a joy to behold. He is a veteran of the Bosnian War and now works as a prep cook but is completing a criminal justice major with an eye toward becoming a law enforcement officer. Before taking Basic Writing with Jennie-Rebecca Falcetta in fall 1997, he was "scared" of writing, but after a semester of hard work, Noel has "a new-found confidence." He lists as his hobbies "living life and having fun while doing it." Noel is 23.*

The Night I Took My Last Pumpkin

by John McManus

It was a late October night in the fall of 1990. I had only been out of high school four months and had the constant pressure of making something of myself mounting with every day that passed. I had just returned home on leave after completing three months of boot camp in the United States Navy and had every intention of making the most of my time home. The minute I got home I was on the phone calling all my friends and had only been home for a few nights before realizing nothing had changed.

Since I had been home I had gone out every night so far with my friends and this night was guaranteed to be as fun as the last or so I thought.

The mood in the car was fantastic! You would have sworn every one of us had won MegaBucks. It felt like there was enough energy and excitement between us to power New York City for a century.

I recall looking up at the sky and noticing that it was a completely cloudless night. It was close to the end of the month and the moon was full. It was so bright that when you looked down you could see your shadow. I can remember thinking, "I could get into a lot of trouble on a night like this."

Usually every year about this time, my friends and I would stir up a little mischief and we saw no need that night to break the tradition.

This began our uncontrollable search for pumpkins. When I say pumpkins, I mean every pumpkin we could find! We were non-biased: big ones, small ones, fat ones, tall ones. We didn't care as long as we could acquire them. With every pumpkin we got it raised the stakes that much higher and the rush was intense. We felt all powerful, almost untouchable, but that would all change as we soon found out.

It was nearing the end of the night and there was only one pumpkin literally within a twenty-mile radius that we had not achieved ownership of and it was causing unrest within the group. The decision couldn't be made 100% to take the pumpkin because of the nature of the circumstances that surrounded it.

In short, the house where it currently resided was a pumpkin thief's worse nightmare. The outside of the house was so brightly lit you would have sworn there was a MENSA meeting inside. There was only one way to get to it which required sneaking past an open window which in turn had someone sitting right next to it. To make things even more difficult the pumpkin sat two feet away from the front door. The last and most pressing problem was the size of the pumpkin. It was so big it would take at least two or more people to carry it. It looked like something you would see at Topsfield Fair.

Given these circumstances most people would have walked away, but not us. We had to have that one last pumpkin and that is how we rationalized it in our heads.

The closer we got to the house the more I could feel the adrenaline pump through my veins and my heart start to race. Before I knew it we were in front of the house climbing the stairs. With every step we took I could hear the loud creaking of the old wooden steps and the only noise that surpassed it was the beating of my heart. It felt like it was about to jump out of my chest. Within seconds we had the pumpkin lifted and off the porch. By the time we were out of the yard the overwhelming fear turned into fits of laughter of disbelief that we actually pulled it off or so we thought.

As we attempted to cross the street to the car, a bright light illuminated us and a loud stern voice yelled, "Hold it right there!" As quick as our fear turned to happiness it turned right back again to fear when we gazed upon the police.

Within seconds the police had us standing at the back of the cruiser with I.D.s in hand checking for prior records. While we stood at the back of the vehicle, the police remained in the front debating whether to put us in jail. The word "JAIL" sent shock waves of reality right through all of us, turning us from daring adolescents to whining babies pleading for them to excuse our misconduct, all the while promising to return every pumpkin to its original owner and apologizing. It was like a bad episode of bad cop/good cop. At the time we did not realize we were being scared into redemption.

It felt like every ounce of control I had over my life had been stripped away and my future could only be determined by the outcome of the two officers' decision. There I was, clinging to every word uttered across their lips, and in complete disarray. The police decided that returning the pumpkins and apologizing to each owner would be punishment befitting the crime. Preoccupied with the notion of freedom we started for the car when the policeman said, "Where are you going?"

We replied, "To bring back the pumpkins."

Then he exclaimed, "I think you gentlemen would feel more comfortable in our car." Right then and there we knew the humiliation of returning all of the pumpkins at two in the morning was unavoidable. Needless to say, the people were not too happy and after that night I vowed never to take another pumpkin again.

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Reformed pumpkin thief ***John McManus****, 26, took Basic Writing with Greg Mendonca in the spring of 1998. A machinist majoring in engineering science, John claims that "before this semester I felt very insecure about my writing skills," but now "I have much more self-confidence in my writing and have overcome my insecurities." In his spare time, John pursues music, basketball, and self-improvement and intends to work in the mechanical engineering field.*

First Dead

by Dennis Richard

The only living things here were us. Even the dirt was dead. It was red clay that had been bombed and defoliated. This was the trace, the furthest northern point in Vietnam in December of 1967. Up here were two-man foxholes, no crowding together. Remember one round will get you all.

We were under constant threat from artillery from North Vietnam. I was new, green, the FNG, but I had made friends in a short time. My foxhole partner Rod and I were friends in days. So here we were just waiting, taking limited artillery fire, but not in our position. Rod had told me, "Just a matter of time. They are measuring us before they zero in on us." Nobody had been wounded yet; I had not seen my first dead, but it would come. It had to.

I was sitting on the edge of my foxhole, talking to Rod and another partner, Shaw. How glad we were that it had stopped raining. It had rained the entire four-day march it took to get here. All of a sudden, here it came: screaming artillery rounds falling on top of us, on target. I fell back into my foxhole, hands over my head. The rounds were coming in twenty at a time, screaming as they cut through the air, then exploding as they hit the ground all around us.

It was over in minutes. I looked over the top of my hole expecting to see Rod and Shaw dead. They had been caught in the flat open ground. Both were in semi-shock, as was I. "Are you OK, man?" I said.

Rod: "Yeah."

Shaw: "I don't know." Rod and I both looked at Shaw. He was holding his shoulder, dazed and wounded.

The smell and smoke of the rounds still were thick in the air. Someone was yelling at me. It was Lieutenant Maguire. "Hurry up! Come help me with the Major!"

The Major? I thought. *What could have happened to him--a career man, a graduate of the Naval Academy?* I ran to the Lieutenant's side. There lay the Major, most of his forehead blown away. He was still alive, moaning without taking a breath. It was a constant moan.

Now the corpsman came running with his medical pack in hand. "OK, let's get his clothes off and see if he is hit anywhere else."

I thought, *Doesn't he see the head wound?* Frantically, the Lieutenant and I pulled his boots off. The corpsman, who now had assistance, was cutting the Major's clothes off with scissors. There he lay, with just his Marine Corps issue boxer shorts on, in that lifeless dirt. The corpsman was dressing the head wound and talking to the Major. I thought to myself, *Is there a chance for him to live with such a serious wound?*

Marines and corpsmen were still running around, but slowly they started to gather around us. After all, it was the Major, the executive officer of the First

Battalion Third Marines. He was hard and intelligent, but always had our well-being in his heart. He knew what we were--kids. Corporal French came on the scene and started to cry. Then the Captain came and said, "Did the Major get hit?"

Corporal French, throwing his helmet down, said, "Yeah, half of his head is blown away."

Silence.

The call had gone out for a medi vac, so we carried him in a makeshift stretcher (a poncho with rifles as support) to the small landing zone we had. As we stood there waiting for the chopper to come, we could see his life slip away, his skin becoming that ash-white color. I thought, *Some wife's and parents' hopes and dreams gone*. The chopper came and picked him up, and I walked back to my foxhole alone. I sat in it and tried to comprehend what had happened. I had kept control. Was it as bad as I thought? *No, I made it. I'm hard. They trained me for this.* Thoughts of an 18-year-old kid.

Twenty-seven years later, I would be in Washington, D. C., on summer vacation with my wife and children. Before and during, they would say, "Dad, are you going to visit the Wall?"

We were at the Lincoln Memorial when my wife said, "It's just over there."

"OK," I said.

I could not believe the feeling I had when I got there. Time stopped. I felt like the only one there. I walked to the directory, automatically turning to the D's: "Duffy, Major. USMC. Dec. 9, 1967."

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Fifty-something ***Dennis Richard*** *is a student of undeclared major at Northern Essex, here to "learn how to learn for now." Dennis, who was a student of Joanna Fortna in spring 1998, lives in Newburyport with wife Barbara and daughters Kerry and Shawna, 18 and 15.*

The Wedding Song

by Shirley Silveira

My friends Manny and Jodie were busy making plans for their wedding coming up in the fall of 1994. The bridal arrangements were all falling into place nicely except they still hadn't found a vocalist to sing for the ceremony.

A few weeks before the wedding, I was busying myself around the house when I heard a knock on the door. What a surprise! It was Manny and Jodie. Although I was happy to see them, I had a funny feeling that they were up to something.

As we were relaxing in the living room, our conversation turned towards the upcoming wedding.

"So, how is everything going?" I asked. "Did you get the DJ to agree on that offer?"

Manny just nodded his head. I could tell he had something else on his mind. He whispered something to Jodie. Then they both looked up at me with silly grins on their faces. Jodie took another sip of her coffee and said, "Shirley, we need you to sing in our wedding. We have been looking around but we can't find anyone we would rather have other than you. I know it's only a few weeks away, but I know you can do it. Please, Shirl, say you will do it. It really means a lot to us."

The bomb was dropped. I sat there for a moment thinking about what she had just said. Part of me was thrilled at the offer; what an honor to be asked to sing in a wedding! The other part of me was terrified. I had never had to sing anywhere except for at church. I wasn't sure I was qualified for such an occasion. If I were to sing in the wedding, it would be in front of over two hundred people I didn't know! What if they didn't like my voice?

Jodie seemed to know just what I was thinking. She got up off the couch and knelt by the chair where I was sitting.

"Shirley," she said, "you have a beautiful voice. You need to take it beyond just church. You need to give yourself a chance. I think you will be surprised at the results."

I didn't know what came over me right then, but what Jodie said made a lot of sense. *Maybe I really do have a good voice*, I thought to myself. I needed to start somewhere so I looked up at Manny and Jodie and gave them an answer.

"Ok, you guys, I guess I'll give it a shot. I hope I don't disappoint you." I could feel the butterflies in my stomach already.

The next day we went to the Bible bookstore in Derry, N.H., to pick out the song I would sing. We chose "Love Will be Our Home," by Sandi Patti. It was perfect. I purchased a tape, which I could practice with at home.

About a week later, I was unaware that Jodie had stopped by while I was making my usual practice runs with the song. She didn't make her presence completely known until I was finished. She came running out from the other

room with tears in her eyes. "That was so perfect," she said. "I knew you could do it! Thank you." She gave me a great big hug and then went on her way.

The wedding day finally arrived. I felt as nervous as the bride herself did! My heart was pounding, and my hands were shaking, but I knew I was ready. I arrived at the church a little early to take my prearranged seat in the front row. I had spent all morning preparing my voice and running through the song a few more times. I watched as the bridal procession made its way tot he front of the church. My cue to go to the front was right when the "Bridal March" fanfare began. Every eye was fixed on Jodie as she made her glorious entrance. This is when I had to quietly slip up to the stage by the microphone so I would be ready to sing when she arrived. This was Jodie's big moment, and also mine! I knew she was nervous, but she wasn't going to let that stop her from enjoying it. That is what I had to do, too.

As Jodie arrived at the front, she looked up at me with a great big encouraging smile. The music started in as I took a deep breath in an effort to relax myself. I tried not to notice my hands trembling as I brought the microphone up to my mouth. I looked at everyone and tried my best to smile in spite of my nerves. I decided I wasn't going to let fear win over this time. I imagined myself sitting amongst the crowd anticipating the song. I made that Shirley hold all my fears and apprehensions, leaving the rest of me free to sing without restraints. It worked! Within a few moments, I had kicked my fear aside and was able to let my voice take over. I was enjoying watching everyone respond to my song. I could tell by their eyes that they liked me. Some were holding back tears, while others were just letting them flow.

When my song was over, I felt like an eagle in flight as I gloriously made my way back to my seat. I was so proud of my song! I sounded better than I ever had in my life. It must have been the audience that brought it out of me. After the ceremony, I was bombarded by people wanting to know who I was and if I had any tapes they could buy. I was told I was the highlight of the whole wedding.

I felt like a celebrity that day. Maybe my dreams of someday being in a recording studio weren't so distant now. I have sung in many other weddings since then, and also at some large church events. I feel Jodie's wedding was the turning point for me in that I had to put aside my fears and have confidence that God really had given me the gift of song.

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"I always loved [writing], but I felt I needed to be boosted in many areas of it," says ***Shirley Silveira****, 28. She feels that her experience in Barbara Stachniewicz's fall 1997 class has given her more confidence as a writer. Shirley is the mother of Melanie, 7, Garrett, 5, and Jonathan, 3, and is planning to complete the RN program at NECC. Not surprisingly, she lists as her hobbies music and singing.*

Shrimper

by Mike McBrearty

In 1972 I went to work on a shrimp boat for the first time. It was with great fear and joy that once again I would work in an environment I loved so much. The fear came from having no idea what it was all about. Having been on boats, from ten-footers to supertankers, my fear was only of what I would have to do to catch shrimp.

The first captain that I worked with was Billy Joe Wilson, a real old redneck who hated everybody and everything. Of course, he seemed to hate me the most. The first night I worked he had me show up three hours early. The first thing he said was, "No damn Yankee will ever become a shrimper."

Let me briefly explain what a shrimp boat looks like and what it is all about. It is 36 feet long and 14 feet wide in the center. On each side is a 20-foot boom that when lowered out to the side holds the nets. When you have lowered the booms, you then slide the nets that are sewn to a rectangular steel frame 16 feet long by 2 feet high. To do this, you first lower the booms until they are straight out; you then slide the frames out and push over the nets.

Now it's time to get the holding tanks ready. You start by closing the drain valve, opening the overflow, and turning on the sea intake pump. The water must keep flowing through the tank to keep the shrimp alive. Live shrimp are what we were to catch and bring back to the dock in the morning.

Let me explain a little about how and what we were paid. For this back-breaking work, we got nine dollars per thousand. This for live shrimp unloaded at the dock in the morning. The captain got six dollars and I got three, very little for a lot of work and hours.

Now the real work started. The captain put the boat on the course he wanted and lowered the nets to the bottom, to be dragged along behind. In this way, the nets would scoop up shrimp--we hoped. We then went slowly along, waiting to pull and dump the nets on trays. In the trays, he told me there would be shrimp, crabs, sea urchins, and fish of many types. There would be sea grass that could and did contain many surprises. One was the normal moray eel, the sea snake; in particular was the scorpion fish. This fish is deadly. In the dorsal fin along its back, there are needle-like points filled with poison.

This poison has been known to make a grown person deadly sick. In my own experience, I have been paralyzed, sick to my stomach, and rushed to the hospital by helicopter on two occasions. Both times I was very glad to have somebody on the boat to call the Coast Guard.

You must understand that you pick up shrimp with bare hands. In picking, you toss everything but the shrimp over the side. The shrimp are tossed into the holding tank. I know firsthand that you will be fired or cussed out for throwing shrimp away. This is most of what you do for 12 to 14 hours a night.

I must tell you that as hard of a job as this is, there are times when it's fun. One night I took a friend out with me. As he had never been out there before, I kept a close eye on him. Around midnight his frame came up turned around, and he asked me what to do; I told him to wait. When I looked around he was gone; I yelled his name time and time again, but no answer. Just as I started to become worried, he came walking along the side of the boat. It seemed that he had gotten over the side and walked the frame around. We spent the rest of the night laughing our asses off.

One night, I took my wife and five-year-old son out to work. My son had been out many times before but this night he wanted to work. I told him, "Kevin, pick up the live shrimp and throw them in the tank and the dead ones over the side." Well, for most of the night this was fine.

About 2 a.m., I was at the wheel when my wife called me out of the cabin. Lo and behold, there stood Kevin. He was chest-high in the holding tank. We looked at each other and he said, "It's OK, Dad. I can swim." With that we pulled him out, undressed him, rinsed him off, and wrapped him in a blanket. We put him in the cabin and fast asleep he went. At 6 a.m., when we finished unloading, there he stood, hose in hand, ready to clean the boat. If only the strength of youth and the wisdom of age could be combined.

There was also the night I took my wife with me. Around 10 p.m., with the tide going out, I ran aground. Knowing full well that we were stuck for the night, I called a friend on the radio to pull me loose in the morning. We then rigged the nets and booms and decided to enjoy the night. The first thing we did was put some mats on the deck. We then turned up the FM and lay back. It was a full moon and very clear that night. For the first time in a long time we could talk and just be together, alone. This may not seem like much, but I worked seven days a week. Today, seven years after her death, I know how lucky I was to have a job that let me bring my family along.

I must tell you of the first time I saw Billy Joe. He was standing on the back of the shrimp boat, wearing black rubber boots, a T-shirt, bib overalls, and a straw hat. He was a Farmer Brown if I ever saw one. Over the years I learned that he *was* a farmer. He lived on ten acres of land in South Miami, where he grew tomatoes in hard coral soil. I also came to realize that as shrimpers, we too were farmers of a kind. We harvested the fruits of the sea.

Well, I proved old Billy Joe wrong. The day he died I took my own shrimp boat out alone. I just rode around drinking beer and thinking of him and how far I had come. Between 1972 and 1994, I had become a captain and a boat owner, and I had a son who was a captain. My daughter and her spouse own and run two boats themselves. This is their livelihood, as passed from one generation to another.

In 1994, being old, tired, and sore, I gave it up to get an education. So here I am, trying to pass this writing course, which has more danger than shrimping ever had.

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A student of Barbara Stachniewicz in spring 1998, ***Mike McBrearty*** *brings unique life experiences to his writing, such as this tale of his shrimping days. He is pursuing an associate's degree in humanities and intends to go into the social work field. Mike, 55, who felt "not good" about writing before he returned to school, feels "great" about it now. He lives in Haverhill.*

Ralph's Café

by Christopher Sullivan

Have you ever bitten off more than you can chew? Last March, my brother Mike worked for a restaurant called Ralph's Café. It was a small Italian restaurant in a little plaza next to a gas station.

Mike was the only dishwasher there at the time and he was working every day of the week. He signed up for driver's education and needed someone to work the days he would be in class.

I was working at Market Basket at the time and I decided to work at Ralph's as a second job. I thought to myself, "Dishwashing, how easy. Sure I can handle it, no problem."

My first day washing dishes was an experience I won't forget. I worked nonstop the whole four hours I was there. I had to stand in front of a sink and scrub off all the food that was stuck on the plates and silverware. My neck was so sore from leaning over and looking down into the sink. This was sheer hell!

Dishwashing was nothing I expected it to be. It sounded so simple, but the stress that went along with it just blew my mind. The stress was caused by the worry of falling behind and letting the dishes pile up. The thought of my boss yelling at me, due to the fact that I was going too slow and not being able to keep up, caused me to feel very nervous and edgy.

This job wasn't any good for me because I am good working with people. Unlike Market Basket, I had absolutely no contact with customers. I was in a kitchen twice the size of my bedroom. I was all by myself, staring into a sink full of spaghetti sauce and dirty dishes. My hands smelled like bleach when I finished. When I got home, the smell of the bleach would still be there. My hands had that softness to them from being in water for so long.

It was a very tough environment to work in. In the summer it became intensely hot in the kitchen because only the restaurant had air conditioning. I could smell nothing but spaghetti and spices. I had to listen to ancient Italian music while working and they had a big fan in the kitchen that made a loud humming noise. The sound of this fan made my head spin. I just wanted to block my ears and hear something that didn't remind me of where I was. These were the sounds of hell, on Earth that is.

Instead of being a dishwasher, I knew I would be better off as a waiter or a manager. Right from the start I knew this job was not going to work. This job didn't require any prep work. It was basically the same routine over and over. It drove me crazy. The time would go by so slowly. I dreaded working. The clock just wouldn't move when I watched it.

The most interesting thing about the job would have to be the people I worked for. Their last name was Feole and they were definitely your average stereotypical Italian people. I would listen to them bad mouth everyone they knew. They would talk about their whole life story. I could only imagine what

they would say about me when I wasn't working. While I was washing the dishes I would constantly think about these bad people they were talking about, trying to picture in my head what they would look like. Even when work was over, I would go home and still have the thought of these bad sounding people in my head. I just couldn't get them out of my head. I was in a state of bewilderment, wondering what these people were all about. It was awful and it drove me crazy.

The cook at Ralph's Café was Ester. She was an older lady with a big sarcastic mouth. What came out of her mouth every time she spoke was so offending I wouldn't even dare to ask her something. She was more sarcastic than the Feoles. She was about five feet tall with gray hair and glasses. A real hot ticket, if ever there was one!

Ester had an addiction to gambling and while I was working she would constantly send me to get her scratch tickets next door at Cumberland's. Every five minutes I could hear her voice calling me, "Chrissy, go get me some more of those tickets honey!"

I got a big kick out of this and it made me feel more comfortable around her. Once I got to know her, I found her quite humorous. Five minutes later when she lost I could hear her swearing in the back of the kitchen saying, "I never win on those damn tickets!" I thought to myself, "If she never wins, then why does she buy them? How stupid can this lady actually be?" I have to admit working with this lady was definitely a real trip.

There were three responsibilities that go with this job. The first responsibility would be working fast enough and not falling behind a mountain of dishes. The second was to be on time and not call in sick. The last responsibility was to not put away any dirty dishes and try to be as clean as you possibly can.

I was good at this job when it came down to those three responsibilities. I had experience beforehand, because I was currently working at Market Basket and there I was the clean up kid in the bakery. I was a dependable person who fell behind sometimes, but worked hard and consistently to get back on track. I was always on time and I never called in sick.

Working at Ralph's Café has showed me what a good worker I really am. I have learned how tough being a dishwasher is and that doing a job that doesn't suit you can make you better at what you are good at doing. It more or less made me realize what my skills and strengths are.

This job has made me realize how important my education is. I figured out that I couldn't wash dishes for the rest of my life. I would eventually have to come down to earth and face reality. I knew if this was the road I would take after high school, it would be very hard. Therefore, I came to the conclusion dishwashing just wasn't my bag.

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Nineteen-year-old ***Christopher Sullivan****, of Salem, N.H., was a student of Barbara Stachniewicz in the fall of 1998. Before beginning his writing class, Chris says, "I felt kind of shaky and wasn't sure if I would do well." Now, however, he is sure he "could write about anything and get a good grade on it." A PC specialist major at NECC, Chris enjoys playing cards and attending concerts and sporting events in his spare time.*

From Mason to Student

by John H. Giles

As I look back on my career in masonry, I can't help but wonder if I would have gotten as far if I hadn't been living on Martha's Vineyard. The island allowed me to prosper even without any formal education or training. I literally learned by trial and error, and before I knew it, I went from being eighteen years old with no job to getting introduced by my stepfather to a man who was a mason. His name was Paul and he was a huge man with strong features, and even with his rustic appearance, he was very polite and funny. Paul wasn't huge in a tall way, for he merely stood five foot four and I felt as if I towered over him. He was built like a tree trunk, with solid arms and a barreled chest. I liked him right away and he must have felt the same, because he hired me on the spot.

I was picked up the next day at my mother's house, where I was staying. We drove to a job site near a beach on the south side of the island. The warm June sun felt nice on my face, and the salt-water waves crashing against the sandy white beaches sounded like the rumbling of thunder off in the distance. Above the beaches and ocean, the cloudless sky was breathtaking.

We drove into a clearing where a bulldozer had removed the top layer of earth and a hole was being dug by a backhoe. I would smell the freshly turned earth and I liked what it smelled like. I would become accustomed to that scent of earth mixed with machinery, for whenever I smelled it, it would remind me of work and money.

The hole was finished and it was time to go to work. It was about twenty-five by thirty feet in diameter, and flat at the bottom. Paul broke out a measuring tape and two shovels. He said, "Jump in." So I did. He threw in the shovels, and threw me the tape.

I asked him "What are we doing?" He pulled a plan of a foundation out of his pocket, and told me we were digging footings for a foundation that we would build from blocks later. We dug holes around the perimeter of the hole one foot deep and sixteen inches wide. That took about three hours, and I was getting pretty tired, when a cement truck pulled up. We poured the cement into the hole we dug and leveled it off with a two by four piece of wood.

Paul said, "Let's take a break." So we climbed out of the hole and got our lunch that we had in our coolers. Sitting on the back of the truck, I asked him if this work was always so hard, and he said, "It gets harder when we start laying block." It was my first day on the job, and I knew that I was going to like this kind of work because it was outside and physically demanding. I was only eighteen and full of energy.

As the years went by and the work stayed steady, I was allowed to do jobs on my own. I soon became my own boss and was highly regarded as a good

worker and mason. The job also came with a few downsides. Because I had very little education, I lacked the knowledge that was essential for keeping a business running. I couldn't keep my bills and my books in order, and I had forgotten a lot of the basic math skills that were necessary for my everyday type of bill. I was also plagued with injuries.

One of the injuries I received caused me to walk with a limp. I had fallen off a building that I was working on and had broken both legs and crushed my heel. I remember that day clearly. I arrived early to get the job going. It was an early April morning and sun was just coming over the trees. The air was a chilly thirty-seven degrees, but it was warm enough to lay brick, and I wanted to finish the chimney I was working on, so I could get paid. I climbed up the ladder, and onto the roof. The sun was warm and had dried the frost off the shingles nicely. As soon as I stepped onto the other side that hadn't been in the sun I realized I was going for a ride. It was covered in frost and I knew there was only one thing to do – I swung myself around and reached for my hammer that was lying on the peak of the roof. Grabbing the hammer with my right hand, I tried to slam the claw end into the shingles, but the hammer wouldn't grab. I spun myself around to a sitting position, so that I might see where I was going to land, and to try to control my landing.

After sliding about twenty feet down that frosty roof, I was airborne and falling quickly. I let out a scream and then I hit the ground, landing on my feet. The pain was instant, and I could feel the bones in my feet and legs snapping. I fell forward and my neck got hung up on a fence. I pulled myself off of the fence and fell to the ground. Blood was spurting from my neck and there was no way I would be able to stand.

There was no one with me, and I was out in the boonies, so I knew I would have to go it alone. I tore the sleeves off the sweatshirt I was wearing and wrapped it around my neck. I began to crawl to my car because I knew I would either bleed to death or die from internal injuries. The pain was unbelievable, and I felt like I was going to throw up. Crawling into the car, I didn't think I could drive but I had to try. The pain in my right leg was excruciating, but my left didn't feel as bad. I started the car and put it into drive. I pushed on the gas with my left foot and the car began to move. It was only about a half mile to the hospital, but it seemed like more. I drove gingerly into the emergency parking area and parked the car close to the emergency entrance. I opened the car door and fell to the ground. Crawling to the emergency door, I could see a couple nurses coming out to greet me. I couldn't stand the pain any longer, and I passed out. When I woke up, I found myself lying in a bed with no clothes on and my legs covered in ice.

I received a broken heel, and numerous other broken bones in my legs and feet. I had also lost a salivary gland and received over fifty stitches in my throat. I couldn't walk again for nearly two years. This put a tremendous strain on my business and finances. After getting back on my feet, I found it impossible

to recover financially, and also found that the psychological damage of being on my back for two years had left me unable to recover mentally either. I turned to alcohol for dealing with everyday life, and that's where I would stay for the next five years. Again, because I had little education, I found it very difficult to find work. That's when I decided to get help for my alcohol problem and to get back into school.

There are good things about the job that I had, and also bad. One of the things I miss the most is working outside on the island, especially in the spring and summer, because of that fresh sea air and the natural beauty of the sunny island of Martha's Vineyard. The winters were a whole different story. Working outside in the winter was extremely cold and windy, and I found myself getting frostbitten at least once a year. The work slowed down because of the drastic decline in population, and the isolation also had a great effect on my motivation and performance in getting the job done.

I learned a lot owning my own business, but my body just doesn't perform the way it used to. I'm glad I went back to school, because I know now that I can learn to do something that I really like without the hard physical labor that has left me with a permanent limp and arthritis in the bones I've broken. I'm only thirty-five, but the elements have made me look forty-five. I have a second chance at life and I will not let it go to waste.

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Mason extraordinaire ***John Giles****, 35, took Basic Writing in the fall of 1997 with Barbara Stachniewicz. He says he hated writing before he began the class but is "beginning to like it" now that he has written such essays as the one included in this volume. John is a liberal arts major whose career goals are as yet undefined; in his spare time he enjoys painting and sculpturing.*

How to Avoid a Player

by Guarina Jaquez

"Hey yo shorty! What's up, beautiful? Want a ride?" These are words from the players in the streets that try to get all the women, but when they come to me, I tell them they are messing with the wrong girl.

When I was younger, I used to walk a lot in the streets with friends and we always used to get all these guys screaming things like, "Beautiful, come here! Let me give you a kiss." But now they scream nastier things like, "Hey baby, I wish you were in my bed, and have you next to me all night."

These guys might seem like normal guys because they dress and act like humans. They are always smelling good, driving the nice cars with loud music. They are trying to be the nicest and sweetest guys, but inside they are DOGS. There are a lot of ways to avoid a player, but I want to talk about some special techniques that I use to avoid these DOGS.

The first step is to be very careful when you smile to guys on the streets because you might be smiling to the wrong guy. If you do smile because you thought it was the right guy and he starts screaming things from across the street, just ignore him and he'll get the point.

Next, when you meet a guy, check his fingers. He might have a wedding ring and you don't want to be talking to a married man.

Another very important thing is to avoid guys whose girlfriends you know, because no real man is gonna start sweet talking to an ex-girlfriend's friend. If he does then you know he is a player and you could even lose a friend because she might think you are interested in him.

If you go on a date with this player and at the end of the night you kiss him, and right away he sighs and starts telling you how good you kiss: DON'T BELIEVE HIM. He wants to look passionate and sincere. Don't trust him, because he's a snake in the grass ready to bite and poison you.

Players usually lie a lot. So let's say you are in a restaurant with him and he goes to the bathroom. Check on him. He might be using the phone, calling the other girls. You don't want to be an intruder either, but go up to him and say, "Hi honey, who are you talking to?" real loud. If it's a girl she will get the point that he is busy with someone else.

Next, if he starts sweet talking you, telling you that you are the only one he really likes and making you feel real special, be careful. Players do this to make you fall in love with them.

If he is your boyfriend already, make sure he doesn't have a pager because he could be giving the number to all the girls he meets in the streets. If he does have a pager, make sure you check all of his pages. If there is a number you don't recognize you could call the number and get him on check.

You also want to talk to his friends or people that know him. That way you can know what he is doing in the streets when he is not with you. And, if he

is doing something you don't like, let's say talking to another girl, it's time to kick him to the curb because he is not worth wasting your time. Also make sure he doesn't get too close to your friends because he wants to use them if he messes up with you, and that way they will defend him.

Finally, don't introduce him to your parents because that is something more serious. This means you want to get more involved with him, but with a player nothing can get serious.

There is nothing more pleasurable than unmasking these DOGS, especially when it is right in their faces. Don't be afraid to be vicious. Do what you have to do in order to protect yourself from them. So please, follow my advice wherever you go. I am sure that if you do, you'll never get caught in their claws.

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When Guarina Jaquez, 18, isn't outsmarting predatory males, she enjoys dancing. A liberal arts major planning a career in hotel management, she was a student in Claudia Stern's class in the fall of 1997. Guarina entered the course thinking writing was "hard and boring," but by the end of the semester "found out it was easy and fun!"

Teaching Men How to Date

by Joanne Manzer

I am good at talking to men about how to begin a new relationship with a woman, and how to maintain it. I've had all types of men talk to me about women they want to ask out on a date, but who feel insecure because they are afraid of rejection.

The first thing I'll do is to listen to the man tell me about this new person, and how he is feeling about himself. Most men will appear nervous and reluctant to make eye contact at first, but I tell them that whatever is said between us will remain between us, confidentially. I explain to him that I am a woman, and I believe in myself as a woman that can identify with the differences between women and men.

I then explain that it is important for the man and his potential companion to refrain from any sexual advances or sexual conversation until they've had some time to get to know each other well enough to be talking about intimate things. It would be better to wait for the woman to bring up the subject or give hints to the man when she is ready. Most women are more interested in a man who wants to get to know them for who they are, rather than what they have. Sexual advances may scare or turn a woman off.

I suggest to the man that he get some information about the woman over the phone before they go out on their first date. He should call the woman and ask her what she likes to do in her spare time, and what kind of foods she enjoys. This will give him an idea what they might do together on their first date.

Getting to know the person slowly, standing back and observing and not rushing into a relationship is another piece of advice I give to the man. I advise him not to kiss her for the first three dates, and when they do kiss for the first time, he'd better ask before going ahead! When the evening is over, he must be sure to drop her off safely where she lives. And there are to be no nightcaps or dinners at each other's homes for at least two weeks.

I explain how important it is for him to listen well when his date wants to engage in conversation. I tell him to watch for clues from a woman who will put unreasonable conditions on him, by information she gives about other men she has dated in the past. This will give him some insight into whether the woman is controlling, insecure about herself in a relationship, or a distrustful person by nature. This is not the kind of person anyone would want to have a serious or lasting relationship with.

I tell the man that neither person should put conditions on the other. The strongest relationships are ones in which each individual works on bettering him/herself, feels good and secure about who they are, and won't change anything about themselves that they believe in. I tell the man to believe in himself, and if the new partner is the right one, she will believe in him too. He

should never try to change the person he is interested in, and if any changes need to be made, he can only hope for change, accept things the way they are, or move on if that is the best solution.

It is important for the man to understand the importance of giving space to his new dating partner. It's not good to call every day, or to see each other too much at first. Twice a week is a good amount of time to get to know each other the first month or two.

When enough time has passed, it is ok to ask the woman over for a home-cooked meal if she feels comfortable enough to be alone with the man. A movie would be a good choice after dinner, and he should be sure to have her favorite beverages and dessert that she enjoys.

I tell a man to try to be sensitive, sincere, honest with the new dating partner, and to keep the lines of communication open. If the couple feels uncomfortable or unsure about anything, they should be sure to discuss it before it becomes a problem.

When the time comes and the couple decides to become intimate, the man should always ask the woman what she enjoys while making love, and also what she is uncomfortable with while making love. I tell the man to always be safe and responsible and wear a condom.

As a final piece of advice, I always tell the man to be himself. If there is one thing that turns a woman off, it is a man who appears to be perfect in every way when she first begins dating him, only to find out after becoming intimate and serious that he is a real jerk!

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We're not sure where ***Joanne Manzer*** *found the time to write this semester! A Human Services major who hopes to pursue a career working with children with behavioral problems, Joanne, 36, is also the full-time mother of five, ages 10, 11, 14, 15 and 18! In her meager spare time, she enjoys camping with the kids and family get-togethers. Before her semester in Faith Benedetti's class in spring '98, she says she always enjoyed writing to get out her feelings and to learn about herself. After the course, she finds her skills and formal understanding of the ways language works are greatly increased. She feels more confident than ever in expressing herself on paper. She lives in Methuen.*

Knuckle-Dragging: A How-to Guide

by Lon Jackman

I'm screaming down a hill. I'm going so fast. I can feel that I'm going to fall. There's a loud thud as my body smashes onto the ground. My eyes are opened by the fear that I might have just knocked my brains loose, but I soon realize this is just a dream, maybe an unconscious thought about the day to come. Considering I am a good snowboarder, these dreams can make the paranoid a schizophrenic mess. You don't want to worry about things like this. If you do, they will just consume your day, and you might not try as hard to have a good time.

The biggest problem with snowboarding is having to wake up real early in the morning. You have to leave early, around 6:00 a.m., because the lifts start running at 8:30 in the morning and the ride is usually at least two hours. If you were up real late the night before, then usually you will be dragging. You don't always have to take a shower. I usually do, so the snow bunnies won't think I'm a dirt bag. I also take one to help me wake up. A good breakfast is always important also, because you will be using a lot of energy over the day, so eat well.

When the ride arrives and the driver shows his beautiful face, you realize the world is very ugly at this time of the day. If you think about it, you probably are of equal ugliness. I mean, who wants to go out in the cold and have to deal with this dark world?

It's very important to check and see if all the necessities are in your bag before you leave. If you don't have warm clothes, odds are you will be cold for the rest of the day. If you have to purchase equipment when you get there, it will cost you an arm and a leg. I always bring extra stuff, such as a change of mittens in case the ones I am wearing get wet, a couple of hats because I can never decide which one to wear, and another pair of goggles. You have to remember your boots, board, and of course a jacket. Remember, before you leave bring some money because you never know when you might have some type of problem. Also, do yourself a favor and make yourself a lunch before you go. The cost of food at a resort is very expensive. Now you can place your equipment and yourself in the vehicle you're taking to the mountains. Off you go!

Most of the guys I go with insist on getting fried the minute we hit the highway. This isn't necessary because it will just make you tired later. I usually like to go back to sleep, though sleeping isn't the best thing you should do. The guys might take advantage of you while you're unconscious. For example, you would be videotaped while someone is putting stuff up your nose or have permanent marker on your face and not even know it.

When you get to the mountain it's usually about 10 to 20 degrees colder. So, grab your stuff and try to run like hell for the lodge. The reason I said "try"

is because there might be snow or mud on the ground. Once you get to the lodge it's important to check the time. If the lifts haven't started to operate, then there's no sense in getting dressed. So the best thing to do is purchase a hot chocolate and relax. Take your time getting dressed; you're in no hurry. If the lifts are in operation, get dressed fast so you can get on, but don't forget to buy your lift ticket. The price of a ticket can be anywhere from $20.00 to $50.00. These prices are based on size, conditions, time of year, and how up-to-date a mountain is. Most areas will try to have the best lifts, good snowmaking equipment, and the best-conditioned landscapes for you, the consumer.

Now once you're outside you should only place your front foot in the binding of the snowboard. If you have both your feet in the binding, you won't be able to push yourself over to the lift. To get to the lift, pump with your back foot. You should be able to almost glide over because most lifts have a gradual incline that should pull you right to it. Now remember, you want to be the first one down the mountain because the best conditions are in the morning. Only the people who check the trails have been lucky enough to go down them. If there has been a snowfall from the night before, then don't go inside until you absolutely have to. This is an example of good snow because it hasn't been packed down into an icy mess. As you are about to get on the chair, don't be intimidated by it. The people who operate the lift will help you get on if you're having any problems. So don't worry, be happy. Sit down on the chair, relax, and put the safety bar down.

Once you get to the top it's important that you don't fall getting off the lift. If you fall then you might feel like an ass and they might have to stop the lift. Getting off the lift can be scary. Just before you get to the end, you have to remember to pick the bar back up. If you don't do this, you will end up going back around and this could make you feel stupid. Now point your board forward, place your back foot on the binding, and let the chair give you a little push. Once you're back on solid ground, you can clip your back foot into the binding and you're ready to go down the mountain.

If you are a hardcore snowboarder like I am then go right up to the top and find the hardest trail you can. You will learn a lot faster this way because you don't really have a choice. You could ask the patrol guys to take you down to the bottom, but this would take your hardcore edge away. The patrol guys will suggest that you stay on the bunny trails after that.

The second option might be the best option for the average human. Most mountains have some type of "learn to snowboard free" offer that might help you a lot more than hurt you. Taking this option would allow you to have a gradual learning experience, instead of a terrifying death ride.

The best way to learn to snowboard is to practice the "falling leaf" technique. When a leaf falls out of a tree, the leaf tends to sway back and forth through the air until it touches the ground. Now pick a nice easy trail and try this for awhile. Another technique you could try once you get the falling leaf

could be learning how to turn. Your body is sideways on the board, almost like a surfer would stand. Place pressure on the left side of the board to turn left and do the opposite to turn right. If you don't try to do this, you will most definitely fall. If you do fall, don't worry about it. If you don't fall, you're not trying hard enough.

When you come to a snowboard park, it's very important to be accepted by the locals. You want the biggest air and the best tricks. You can't stop in front on top or on the backside of any jumps because you can get hurt or hurt someone else. These are blind spots. You also shouldn't stop in the middle of a half pipe. These are all examples of the things that can get you shunned out of the snowboard park. One very important thing to do is watch out for the old-time skiers. They haven't come to terms with this new winter sport. Unless they have tried it, all they see snowboarders as a nuisance. The term best used to describe a snowboarder is "knuckle-dragger."

Around noontime, it's very important to have your share of alcoholic beverages from the bar. This enables you to try crazier tricks and fall down a lot more. If you do fall and break something, the pain isn't as bad for the time being, either. You should also have some lunch. It will give you the energy you need for the rest of the day. Try to eat lunch when the lodges are less occupied, you can get a better seat, and you will be able to enjoy yourself. After this you're ready to hit the mountain again.

When your day comes to a close, gather your equipment and get back in the car for the ride home. Now once you're home all the pain you've accumulated should start to kick in. Take a nice warm shower, get some eats, and fall asleep watching your favorite TV show. Ask yourself, "Did I have fun? Will I try this again?" If the answer to the questions is "No," then you should probably give up and try something easier like skiing.

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Twenty-seven-year-old ***Lon Jackman*** *is a broadcasting and journalism major--not bad for someone who felt "not so good" about writing before entering Jennie-Rebecca Falcetta's class in fall 1997. Lon, who lives in Kingston, N.H., lists as his occupation "singer," and so he is: Münchile, the band he fronts, has been playing quite a few local gigs of late. His future plans are to transfer to a four-year college and to pursue a career in journalism.*

Paranda

by Aixa Delgado

Back when I was a young child about six years old I was first introduced to the music of Paranda. Paranda music is part of the Puerto Rican culture. It has been in our culture for a very, very long time. A Paranda band will consist of anamateur singer and amateur instrumental players. They would play a guitar, bongos, maracas, and a *guijo*. A *guijo* is a horn-shaped instrument of unfinished wood color with lines carved all around. The Paranda will usually play around Christmas time and through the New Year. The Paranda music is very upbeat. Here in the United States people may look at the Paranda as Christmas caroling.

The Paranda is a very sacred part of our lives in my family. It brings all the family together to enjoy one another. When we get ready to go Parandal it is usually late at night. Some of the family would dress up, not in anything special but nice-looking. A Paranda will stand outside a family's or close friend's house and sing songs that only the Paranda would sing. Here in the United States it is very cold at night during winter, so they would open the door fairly quickly unless they were sleeping but eventually they would open the door. In Puerto Rico during the winter the weather is beautiful and you can see a lot of Paranda all over the place. I prefer to Parandal in Puerto Rico more than in the United States where it is celebrated wherever you go.

I was always familiar with the songs. As the years went by I would sing at the top of my lungs so I could be heard. Once they would open the door, they would invite us in and usually offer us something to eat or drink.

I remember when I was a little girl and knew all the jokes I would yell "Bomba!" before any one would even get a chance to hear the punch line. We would have so much fun dancing, singing, telling jokes and most of all just being with the whole family together. We would Parandal till the wee hours of the morning.

It would be great if every culture had their special family band that they can get together during the holidays and have a great time sharing. Music brings a lot to families, and it certainly brought a lot to my family. The relationship grew closer throughout the years. We would stay up late at night going from house to house. Music is a very important part of my life. There are so many songs out there I can relate to with any feeling I am having. Music makes me happy, sad, comforted, or what I like the best is when I imagine I am the singer. A world without music would be very frustrating to live in. Not having that song you can relate to and play over and over again and feel like it understands you would be frustrating.

Most of all everyone has their own preference in music and every culture needs a Paranda where they can enjoy the very best of what they have: their family.

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Lawrence resident ***Aixa Delgado*** *is a student in the Medical Transcribing program at Northern Essex. She wrote her way through Joanna Fortna's class in the spring of 1998.*

Sounds of the Movies

by Robert L. Arguin

Since the introduction of sound to movies, music has played a major part in setting up a scene. From Christopher Lee as Dracula walking down a staircase to the *Titanic* sinking, all were made more dramatic, more exciting and more comical due to music.

I remember the first time I realized how important music was to the movies. One of my first memories as a child was when I went to see my first movie. My parents took me to see *E.T.* I remember how loud the music was, and how the music made the scene so lifelike. A few times I had to close my eyes because the images were so realistic and the music still sent a chill up my spine.

Recently, I rented the old Universal Classic *Dracula* with Bela Lugosi. At first I couldn't put my finger on what was wrong. For some reason I couldn't get into it. Then it hit me, there's no music. The movie felt incomplete. I couldn't feel for the characters the way I should. For example, one of the major characters died in what could have been a very dramatic scene, and I felt nothing. With the right kind of music this movie could have come alive and could have been ten times more scary.

If I had to name a few movies where the music played a major role it would have to be *JAWS* and *Saturday Night Fever*. *JAWS*'s theme music kept people out of the water for twenty-two years. Still, whenever I'm in the water or at the beach I can't help but hear in my head, "Dah Dump. Dah Dump." And it still scares me. Whenever I hear "Staying Alive" thoughts of white suits and the disco era fill my head all because of *Saturday Night Fever*.

Some of the world's most talented musicians and best songwriters have gotten together for the sole purpose of making music for the movies. Imagine the skill it takes to match a scene with the perfect music and how much thought goes into making each scene different from any other. Just think, what takes minutes on the screen can take weeks, maybe months, of preparation. The amount of work that goes into a scene is really mindboggling.

A good example of how much of an impact movie music makes is the sale of soundtracks. Some of the top-selling albums of all time are soundtracks. For example, the *Grease* soundtrack has been on the top thirty for twenty years. People can't help themselves. One minute you're at the movies and the next you're running to the music store to get the soundtrack. Maybe buying the soundtrack allows one to capture a feeling one felt during the movie. Maybe one's favorite romantic movies soundtrack can help make life a little more romantic.

Think of all the great scenes in movies. Would those scenes be as memorable without the assistance of music? I think not. Whether it is the sad sound of a piano while your favorite character dies, the upbeat rhythm that speeds you along a car chase, or the romantic melodies you hear when lovers first kiss, all these sounds of music help bring the movies to life.

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Robert Arguin, 24, took Mary O'Neil's Basic Writing class in spring 1998 with his brother, Steven. The two often came into the Writing Center together and share an interest in. Robert has worked as a hairstylist for several years, and hopes to attend film school in the future (as does Steven). Robert's Basic Writing papers were consistently funny, vivid, and true-to-life.

Music to my Ears

by Raquel Polanco

The world is surrounded by different types of sounds: washing machines, vehicles, and airplanes. However, none of those sounds are pleasant to my ears. The only sound that really makes the difference and which is music to my ears is the sound of a merengue.

I have been listening to merengue since I was born, and every day I like it more and more. I like this type of music because I am from the Dominican Republic, and merengue is the music that represents the Dominicans. It is like our flag. Merengue is well known, not only in my country, but also in all Hispanic countries.

There are many types of merengues, and I like them all. For example, a romantic merengue is good for people who are in love. There is also Merengue Ripiao, Merengue Cumbia, MerenSalsa, and MerenReggae. These types of merengues are a mix of merengue and other types of music from other countries.

There are many popular singers from the Dominican Republic that sing the merengue like nobody else. For example, the most popular one is Juan Luis Guerra. He is the father of our music. Puerto Rico is another country that has a lot of popular merengue players, for example Olga Tanon and Grupo Mania.

There is a merengue that I really enjoy every time I listen to it. The singer is a woman and her name is Millie Quezada. She is Dominican, and she is very popular not only in my country, but in many others. The lyrics of this merengue are very romantic. The song says something like this: "Only with you the hours pass faster, and is a reason to give you my soul. Only with you I feel love in a way I have never felt and there is no space empty, I say no space, between your body and mine. Everything is known." Those are some of the words of my favorite merengue. Maybe you don't find any meaning by reading it, but if you listen to this merengue, I am sure you would like it as much as I do.

There are many reasons why I like merengue. The first reason is because this type of music is like a cure for my problems, for my sadness and stress. When I listen to merengue, my heart starts to beat faster and faster. My brain sends messages of movements to my body, and my legs start to move by themselves as if they were controlled by the rhythm of the merengue. If the merengue is slow, I move slowly. If the rhythm is fast, I move fast. It is like the trees that move according to the movement of the wind.

The second reason why I like merengue is because this type of music is contagious. If I see somebody dancing merengue, I immediately want to do the same thing. When I turn the radio on, and I listen to a good merengue, my blood gets hot and I feel a sensation of excitement. I do not need any drug to feel like that. I just listen to merengue and I am on. The merengue makes me feel excited. It also brings good memories to my life, like the day my boyfriend kissed me for the first time. We were listening to a merengue. The singer was Tono Rosario

and the merengue was very romantic. Every time I listen to it I remember my first kiss. On Christmas Day, I miss my country more than any day and also my parents, who are living there. The only cure that I use to release my sadness is to listen to those merengues that in my country are very popular during Christmas.

I don't listen to merengues only in my house. There are many places where I can listen to it, for example, the grocery store, my neighbors' houses, and on the car radio. Also when I am working and I have free time I listen to music on a little radio that they have there. So I feel much better and relax, forgetting my fatigue.

I could not imagine the world or my life without music. It would be so boring that everybody would always be in a bad mood, including me. Merengue does not have to be the only kind of music you listen to. You can listen to any kind of music, it depends on your taste. The important thing is to listen to music, to become part of it. Listening to music makes me feel special, as if I were the only person in the world. It gives me power, like when I'm dancing. I have control of myself, control of my movements, control of my feelings.

Don't miss the opportunity to feel like that. All you have to do is listen to a good merengue, and I guarantee that all your problems will go away. Just try it.

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Raquel Polanco, 20, is a resident of Lawrence, but lists the Dominican Republic as her native country--the music of which she describes in her selection. A student in Joanna Fortna's spring 1998, class, Raquel "did not like to write at all" when she began but enjoys it a lot more now. She hopes to pursue a career in computer electronics.

Euthanasia

by Noriko Kojima

How would you feel if you were hospitalized by a terminal illness? Imagine you had trouble breathing, and you were in suspended animation. You could not manage living by yourself because of terminal illness. Would you want to live knowing the only way you can survive is with an oxygen tube and some mechanical things in your body?

Recently people have argued that doctors should be allowed to help patients commit suicide. Some people have said that doctors have to keep treating patients even though they will not recover. I do not agree with such an opinion. If a patient suffers from a hopeless disease, he or she should have the right to take a big dose of morphine.

The reason I hold such an opinion is because of my grandmother. My grandmother died two years ago after being hospitalized several times. I visited my grandmother in the hospital many times. The first time I visited her, I could not look at her. She had many thin tubes in her legs, arms, and belly. Also, she had some metallic sticks making holes in her body. I did not know why she had to put those sticks in her body. I just looked at her with a painful frown as if I had the same experience she was having. I asked her whether she felt pain when the tubes were inserted. She answered with a smile, "It's not so painful because with a little endurance, I can get well, right?"

After a few weeks, I visited her again with my mother. At that time, my grandmother had another tube in her nostrils and a mask on her mouth. There was a tube of liquid food and a mask for sending oxygen into her body. My grandmother was unconscious. My mother shed tears a little in silence, and I thought my grandmother was obviously going to die.

When I saw my grandmother's oxygen tube, I was disappointed. It seemed a miserable way to live. I believe that people should breathe by themselves to live as human beings. It is the proof of living.

However, the reverse can be said if a patient has some hope for the future. Though I would not like to take any mechanical things into my body, I would appreciate taking anything into my body that would help me recover in the end even an oxygen tube.

In my grandmother's case, she was 86 years old at the time and had a hopeless illness. Since she had lived past the average life span, she would pass away sooner or later even if she were in good health. Therefore, I wanted my grandmother to pass away peacefully without any pain and suffering.

Doctors must have known my grandmother was going to pass away finally, but they had no choice but to continue ineffective treatment by law. In Japan, practicing euthanasia is still illegal. If doctors performed euthanasia, it would become top news and end up in a courtroom as a murder case. The doctors would lose their status. Laws should be changed to new laws. Doctors

should be assisted to offer euthanasia to respect people's death. Patients and their families should have the right to make decisions regarding euthanasia. People's lives are their own and no one else has the right to decide how it shall end.

Some people stand on the opposite side of this issue. They do not believe in mercy killing. They might say that life is very important and no one has the right to end it. However, with much pain and a hopeless future, what is the benefit for patients? In the hospital room every day patients have waited for someone to visit, or have had nothing to do but just watch the ceiling from the bed. If a patient is in a coma and sleeping forever, he/she is kind of leaving this world. There are no benefits for patients and their families. It is only great suffering and the countdown to the day to die.

From my grandmother's painful end my thoughts about euthanasia have established. If I could have decided my grandmother's treatment, I would have asked doctors to use mercy killing for my grandmother as a peaceful end. If I were in her position, I hope that someone would choose the same decision for me. I believe that people should live by their own energy as human beings. If patients suffer from great pain and have no hope to recover, they should have a choice to have euthanasia.

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Noriko Kojima, 19, from Kyoto, Japan, took Basic Writing with Jennie-Rebecca Falcetta in the spring of 1998. She says that writing in English was difficult for her, because the language has many features not found in Japanese. Recognizable by her continual smile, Noriko is studying graphic arts--and American culture--at Northern Essex and looks forward to a career in an art- or design-related field.

Crime Does Not Come From Love

by JoAnn Santos

I believe crime is one of the biggest problems in our community, not only in our cities but also all over the world. We see it in TV programs movies, news, newspapers, schools, streets, sometimes even in our homes. It is terrible how our community has so much crime. I would have to say crime comes from hate. Whenever I have time to watch TV, I turn on the news and get really frightened. All I would see and hear is about deaths and violence. People killing each other, stealing from each other, abusing and hurting each other. Murder, suicide, rape, theft, shootouts, kidnappings, drugs, alcohol, lies, envy and jealousy are all related. There are so many more things I probably can't even think of right now. But we all know that violence and crime do not come of love.

Last night I watched the 10 p.m. news. There was a story about a man who had been found guilty in the murder of his wife. The story goes he had reported that she was missing for days. He had the whole neighborhood and family and friends on a search or his wife. About one to two weeks later, her body was found inside of a plastic container in one of those rent-out garages. The police came to the conclusion he had beaten his wife to death and then hid her in the basement of their home, all the while crying out to everyone that she was missing. He had then rented out the storage space and left her body there. The same night on the news, there was another case of a man who planned to have his wife killed in a hit-and-run accident. She survived, but with injuries that would stay with her for life. She testified against him in court. And then there was another man who killed his ex-wife and blamed it on his fiancée and her son. What is going on with these men? What is going on in this world, I ask myself?

It is sad to hear these things every day. I wonder sometimes if I can be one of these stories someday. Can something happen to me? Worst of all, what worries me most is what about my child? What could happen to my most precious thing, my baby girl? I pray every night and thank God that she is fine and healthy and that he guards her with his hands and that he may always do so.

It breaks my heart when I see a dead animal run over by a car in the middle of the street. I'm sure it makes a lot of people feel the same way. Now, imagine that the animal (or a person) has not died a natural death – but instead is dead because someone has decided to kill another person. How can someone *plan* to take another person's life, never mind actually carry out the deed?

The most frightening thing is we never know when any of these terrible crimes are going to happen to us. So many families have broken hearts because they have lost a loved one to violent crime, drunk driving incidents, gang-related deaths, to use of drugs and alcohol, to misuse of power and money, to lies and hatred. Families are destroyed by different problems that sometimes evolve into violence – men murder their girlfriends, women kill their husbands, children kill their parents, friends or their classmates at school. People steal from each other

or sell drugs to make themselves think they have a better life. We live in such corruption! What is happening in the minds and hearts of our people? Why does the crime problem grow? It is unexplainable. Why can't we cut this down?

In my opinion, I would have to say that children grow up to carry out actions they have been surrounded by. Everything they see, hear, feel, know and learn shapes the adult they will become. If a certain child is taught to see or think a certain way, they will carry whatever it is they learned inside of them. If we teach our children the wrong things, they will grow with those feelings, grudges or memories of what they experienced. A child who has been loved, cared for, understood, raised with good morals and corrected lovingly with patience will turn out to be a good person – not a perfect one, because we are human. A child who is not loved or cared for, who has not been given the opportunity to learn right from wrong, who has been corrected violently and without affection, may turn into an adult with serious personal problems. If no one loves this child, how will he or she survive in this corrupt world? Will this child go on to love, care or understand? Probably not, because no one ever took the time to love, care or understand him/her. How will this adult handle problems or difficult times in his life? He won't care about correcting his mistakes as an adult, because no one ever corrected him as a child. Our correctional institutions are doing the parenting for these children who were not taught right from wrong!

I think about this and know it is truth. A child is the future. Our children will take our places tomorrow; they will be the adults. I strongly believe that children should be taught right from wrong. They should be kept away from violence, although these days it is very hard to do when they see crime and violence every day in their schools, cartoons and toys. If we don't teach them that violence is not a solution, where will they learn it? If you don't teach a child to read and keep him or her away from books, they will never learn to read. If you teach a child that violence is wrong, they will be less likely to commit a crime. This is common sense.

Sometimes we hear stories about parents who have taught their children right from wrong, who have tried their hardest to raise good, honest people, but who have abandoned their children when they have made a bad or wrong choice in their lives. This is wrong. Parents should always be there for their children, no matter what. We always need someone like a parent to love and understand us, no matter what mistakes we have made in our lives, and no matter how old we are. It is never too late to learn, and we need the advice and help of our families. If you are a parent or family member in this situation, it is important for you to keep talking and explaining because we can always learn new things.

It is very hard to raise kids – I know because I was a kid who used to be trouble sometimes. And now, as the mother of a one-year old baby girl, I know that I have this responsibility to raise this extra special person. What I teach her is what she will learn. What I show her is what she will see. How I live is how she

will live. I love her and guard her with my life and so does her father. We try to take the best care of her that we can. We try to teach her the good and right things of life. And we will instruct her in the right path as much as we can. When she grows up she will know right from wrong. She will be raised without crime or violence and will be given all the love she needs (and more) to be a good, honest person.

I personally don't think crime will ever stop. Unless we all change our lives around completely and be better and honest people to each other, it will not happen. We cannot control what goes on in this corrupt world. But we can make sure that what we are teaching at home is what goes out into the world. If we don't love our children, who or what will they love?

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JoAnn Santos is a Criminal Justice major who hopes to pursue a career as a criminal defense attorney. A student in Faith Benedetti's Spring '98 class, JoAnn , 20, says that before the course, she felt nervous about writing. "I think I can write pretty well now," she says. "I liked writing my stories." She works full-time as Senior Clerk of Inspection Services for the City of Lawrence. In her free time, she enjoys shopping, spending time with her fiancé, Joey, and reading to their one year-old daughter, Anna Karina. They live in Lawrence.

Homelessness

by William Webster

I believe that homelessness is one of the biggest social issues facing the world today. We as a nation can't comprehend the fact that we have a homelessness problem. Whether it is in the United States or whether it be abroad, homelessness does exist, but most of us choose not to see it. Maybe we believe that if we do not see it, then it must not be there. But believe me, it does exist. I have seen it with my own eyes and experienced it, and seeing is believing.

When we see people who are homeless we look down on them and judge them harshly. We consider them to be bums, drunks, drug addicts, etc… In reality they are just like us, but they are people who have lost their way. If, we as a nation allow the homelessness situation to continue unresolved, then we are in the wrong.

America is supposed to be one of the richest countries in the world, yet we have people living in the streets, eating out of our dumpsters, and sleeping in our hallways. The politicians of the world would have you believe there is no problem, or that the problem has been taken care of. But indeed, the situation is not taken care of. Just walk down any street in any city of the world and you can see for yourself. We must come together to rid ourselves of this plague on human kind. By working together, we can solve this common problem. We need to start by getting more people involved, making more people aware of the problem.

We can also help by writing to our representatives in Congress. We must let them know that this is unacceptable, and we are no longer willing to tolerate the problem. We can take our issues and concerns to the media, and see if they will listen. If they will not, we should do whatever we can to make the situation more publicized. Then and only then can we truly call ourselves one nation under God with liberty and justice for all! Who knows what we can accomplish if we put our minds to it and work together. We might be able to wipe out poverty, hunger, disease, and racism. We have to stop seeing homelessness as the city's or the state's problem. Instead, we must look at it as our problem. We have to do everything in our power to help those who need our help.

A good start would be to make available more jobs, education and community resources. I can remember when my family and I were evicted from our apartment 10 years ago. We basically were homeless. We wound up in a shelter in Lawrence called Lazarus House. It was run by a person by the name of Brother Tom. We stayed at the shelter while we were looking for an apartment. We were there for two weeks.

There was a lot going on at the shelter. There were many families with children. That pained me, because when you think of homeless people, you don't often think of kids, but they are homeless too. I was one of those children.

The time at the shelter went by very fast. About a week went by and we found an apartment. Crazy enough, it was right up the street from where the shelter was! So you see, homelessness happened to me, and it can happen to you. Many people are only one or two paychecks away from the streets. So that's why it's not just one person's problem. It belongs to all of us.

There are a lot of things you can do personally to help the homeless. You can volunteer in a soup kitchen. In Lawrence, Bread and Roses provides dinner five nights a week, free of charge to all, and is always in need of people to prepare and serve the meal. You can also volunteer your time to a shelter. Before passing judgment on a homeless person, sit down with him/her and talk to them to find out a little about their life. What was their life like before they lost their way? You must try to create a relationship with them so you can see what they are going through. To actually learn about what they are going through gives you a whole different perspective. So before you sit in judgment, learn more about homeless people and what you can do to be of help. Then we will have earned the right to be called a just nation.

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"To put it bluntly," says ***William Webster****, "I used to hate writing." Now, a semester later, the 26 year-old Lawrence native feels much differently. "I like it a lot more. I feel more confident and saw my skills get better and better." A student in Faith Benedetti's spring '98 class, Bill is a Computer Science major who hopes one day to work as a computer help-desk staffer. He works at Friendly's Restaurant, and enjoys martial arts and football in his free time.*